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AN UNDERSTANDING OF GOD AND EVIL AND ITS IMPLICATION FOR
CHRISTIAN EDUCATION IN THE BLACK CHURCH

A Dissertation
Presented to
the Faculty of the
School of Theology at Claremont

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Religion

by
Willie James Foreman
June 1971

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This dissertation, written by

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and approved by its members, has been presented
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Theology at Claremont in partial fulfillment of the
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The Nature and Scope of the Study

In the past, the black man's identity was bestowed upon him by the white society. In part, it was a spiritual tyranny which attempted to keep the consciousness of the black man at a childhood stage of development in which he emulated his parents--the white society.

Presently there is a new black consciousness or self-identity which is developing. It is concerned with questions of who the black man thinks he is, how he experiences himself to be, and what he is becoming. The clue to the nature and purpose of Christian education in the black church demands that the church speak to the black man in this search.

One's understanding of reality affects one's identity. Within the Christian church, God is understood as the ground of ultimate reality. Most of the history of the black man in America is centered around the covenant community called the black church. It is a history which is unique and rich. The black church was the primary symbol of hope for an oppressed people.

As one reflects on this historical experience in light of our present day experience it is difficult to make any sense from it. What does the theological perspective of the black man's pilgrimage in America have to offer as a means for making decisions now to propel

him into the future?

We have the tradition of belief in an all powerful God. Yet so much evil has been experienced by black people. It is a question of tradition versus experience. My thesis is that the present understanding of God is incompatible with the black experience and that an understanding of God in terms of creation offers new possibilities for self-actualization and an understanding of evil that is related to experience.

There is a serious limitation as far as studies in the area of black theology. This dissertation is written in recognition of this limitation. This investigation recognizes the need for such a task as delving into the black experience from a theological perspective.

It is the purpose of this study (1) to illustrate how God and evil have been and are understood in Christian education material within the black church; (2) to show how the black experience, the Book of Job and contemporary theology can be brought to bear on an understanding of God and evil; and (3) to indicate the consequences of such a study for Christian education in the black church.

Justification for the Study

The black church has made many contributions to the life of black folk. It has been a symbol of hope where seemingly there was no hope. The black church is a gathering place for many people and this gives them a sense of self-worth and belonging. Moreover, it has served as a vehicle for liberation in that many of the ministers during

slavery led insurrections and agitated for freedom. The black church is still needed today as a vehicle of liberation.

I believe that critically reflecting upon Christian education as it is understood in the black church when it is understood as a means of helping one to find himself will strengthen the black church. The present focus in black Christian education is predominantly based upon a literal interpretation of the Bible which is isolated from the specifics of the black condition. The direction of focus in this study will be toward an understanding of God and evil because I feel that there is a need to develop a consciousness among black people that does not hinder the maturation process; but enhances it. The expected results of Christian education so understood are that the person would become alive to himself, his fellowman, and his God.

Format for the Remainder of the Investigation

In light of the forgoing descriptions of the nature and scope of this investigation and its justification, it is necessary to describe the format for the remainder of the study.

The focus of Chapter II will be the black experience as seen from the perspective of the evolution of consciousness. The presupposition is that the black man's understanding of reality and God has been able to change to meet the demands of a new experience. I believe that such a change can happen again through a conscious effort, and I believe that Christian education can help in this process.

The focus of Chapter III will be to show how God is understood

in Christian education material and the effect this has upon the black church. The presupposition is that one's understanding of God and his relation to evil reflects how he views the world and how he participates in that world. My purpose is to show that the black man has not adequately reformulated his view of God since slavery.

The focus of Chapter IV will be the Book of Job, and its relevance to the black experience. Job broke with his tradition in coming to a new understanding of God. For Job, it was the death of the God of his tradition and the appearance of the true God manifesting himself in creation. This has relevance for the black church today. It raises the important question, "How does one participate in creation?" Specifically, I will use modern categories as they relate to the black man in self-actualizing himself; and I will relate this to theology. The presupposition is that in the Christian tradition God is not necessarily one who acts only in history, but is also active in creation. In fact, history itself may be viewed as a product of the creative process rather than an independent entity.

In Chapter V I will develop some of the main insights from Job in light of contemporary theology as these bear on the problem of God and his relation to evil.

Chapter VI will indicate the consequences of this study for black Christian education in the contemporary church. In this chapter I will also include a summary of the major issues investigated and suggest what direction the black church must take.

Methodology and Sources for Data

The methodology of the investigation combines the historical, analytical, and empirical approaches because the data supplied for the investigation are historical, analytical and empirical. The sources include previous studies on God and the nature of evil, research papers, preliminary working and discussion papers written for classes and workshops, church school literature, periodicals, books, magazine articles and my experience in the black church.

CHAPTER II

THE BLACK EXPERIENCE

Perspective of this Chapter

In this chapter we must look at a distinct vision that black folk have had of reality and their implication for the development of theology. The visions are specifically those of the African community of the slave period and the American black community of the same period.

I will show how these black communities structured their theology to meet the demands of their experience. Vision in this sense, as defined by Cobb, refers to the "preconscious, pre-critical structuring of the experienced world."¹ He clarifies this even further. My view was and is that

. . . this structuring is influenced by critical and conscious beliefs and in turn influences them, but that it functions much more widely than these beliefs, many persons learn and accept beliefs that are out of harmony with their vision of reality. The vision remains the basis of life-determining convictions in spite of avowed opinions. Nevertheless, eventually the conscious entertainment of such belief can alter the vision. For example, the vision of the world as creation could determine the basic attitude of persons toward God and man even when consciously avowed beliefs did not fit with it, but the beliefs in question have gradually destroyed the vision.²

Implicit in this understanding of "vision" is the idea that one's

¹John Cobb, *God and the World* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1969), p. 136.

²*Ibid.*

understanding of the nature of God determines, to a large part, his view of reality.

Black religion today cannot be understood apart from its African heritage. It is a continuum. Yet most historians start with the new world as if it were the beginning when they attempt to understand the black experience. I have used the period of the eighteenth and first half of the nineteenth century as a basis for my understanding of slavery as well as for an understanding of the African religion of West, East and Central Africa, since it was from there that most of the slaves were taken and brought to the western hemisphere.

I have begun with African religion to show that the slave's contact with Christianity in the United States was the beginning of the crossing into a new structure of existence. I have used some of Cobb's categories in his book entitled, *The Structure of Christian Existence*, primarily as the skeletal framework for this chapter with other sources serving as the flesh.

The African Experience

African religions have been most misunderstood by Western scholarship. They have been called "primitive" and "unsophisticated."

The similarities in African religions outweigh their differences. Father Tempels in his book, *La Philosophie Bantoue*, argues that the concept of "vital force" or "dynamism" is central to Bantu religion. For some writers this provides the key to all African

religion, and in particular to the vexed question of the nature of its polytheism, and the relation of the many gods to the Supreme Being. I would support this view as a key to understanding African religion.

The African understanding of the universe assents that an impersonal spiritual power or life-force pervades and controls all things. Parrinder describes this in terms of "nyama."

In many parts of West Africa there is a word 'nyama' . . . sometimes used as a title for God, sometimes of human or animal strength, or again as the mysterious force in medicines. Nyama is often conceived of as impersonal, unconscious energy, found in men, animals, gods, nature, and things. Nyama is not the outward appearance, but the inner essence.³

He further states that this is " . . . an impersonal power regarded with great awe . . . potent but non-moral . . . a latent energy in things which is not visible in the outward-appearance but can be seen in the effects produced."⁴

Price, writing on Maluur rain cults indicates a similar understanding.

Mulungu, a name used for God widely in Central and East Africa, is used in Maluur to indicate rain. But Mulungu, rain or God is activity, vital force, mysterious and ultimate. Mulungu is the source of life, yet impersonal, having no chosen people and not worshipped.⁵

³Geoffrey Parrinder, *West African Religion* (London: Epworth Press, 1949), p. 21.

⁴*Ibid.*

⁵Geoffrey Parrinder, "Traditional Religions and Modern Culture (Africa)," in *Proceedings of the XIth International Congress of the International Association for the History of Religions*, I (1968), 101.

This psychic power manifests itself in all things in a hierarchy of forces. Some are more effective than others. Father Tempels says of the Bantu, "After the class of human-forces come the other forces, those of animals, those of vegetables, those of minerals. But in the midst of each of these classes is to be found a hierarchy according to the vital power."⁶

Into this system of interacting forces comes the spirits in which Africans believe--the ancestors and the forces of nature.⁷ Above all of these forces, ancestors, and gods is the Supreme Being. He is remote except in times of emergencies. Yet, His power is supreme. Parrinder ties all of these spiritual powers together in the following paragraph.

The relationship between these spiritual powers, has been aptly represented by a triangle. At the apex is the sky, which symbolizes the Supreme Power from whom all life flows and to whom all returns. The base is the earth, sometimes personified as a goddess, but always important to man as the producer of his food and the burying place of his dead. On the earth lives man, and his chiefs and kings are rungs in the ladder between himself and God. On one side of the triangle are the ancestors, rising up in the hierarchy by their increased powers. Dead kings and chiefs are their leaders and potent to help or harm. On the other side of the triangle are the gods, or natural forces which must be propitiated lest they become angry at neglect and cause seasons to fail.⁸

The Supreme God in Africa is given different names but his

⁶Placied Tempels, *La Philosophie Bantoue* (Paris: Editions Africaines, 1949), p. 42.

⁷Parrinder, *West African Religion*, p. 23.

⁸*Ibid.*, p. 24.

role in African life is generally the same. He is the first cause, creator of all, owner of the sky, ruler of the universe. He manifests his power in the sun, moon, stars, storm, rain, and the rainbow. Yet this God is too remote for regular worship. There are other minor deities such as the sun, moon, storm, water, earth. Death releases a man's spirit and he joins this other realm of existence. An ancestor can protect, punish, or act as mediator for his descendants. Most spirits, excluding the ancestral ones, are non-moral and impersonal. A force may be summoned and put to evil purposes. All religious symbols contain a psychi, and can be used to create desired effects. The entire person is involved in a union with the spiritual. Often the person becomes possessed by the spirit. The important fact is that the supernatural is incorporated in all of African life.

Let us now look at the development of African existence during this period as it is derived from this vision of reality from the nature of its consciousness. Cobb uses the term "civilization" for a stage of cultural development in which cities were built which required new forms of social organization.⁹ Today, as in the days of the great traffic in slaves there are cities on the Gold Coast, Western Nigeria, and Eastern Nigeria. Complex economic, social and political institutions developed in order for the society to function. These societies were essentially agricultural with a considerable degree of

⁹ John Cobb, *The Structure of Christian Existence* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1967), p. 46.

specialization.¹⁰ The economic system permitted the production of a surplus beyond the subsistence level. Herskovits gives a clear description of the economic patterns of this existence.

A class structure has been erected on this economic base that has tended to encourage that disciplined behavior which marks every phase of life. In the field of production, this discipline takes the form of a pattern of cooperative labor under responsible direction, and such mutual self-help is found not only in agricultural work, but in the craft guilds, characteristically organized on the basis of kinship. This genius for organization also manifests itself in the distributive processes, here the women play an important part. Women, who are for the most part the sellers in the market, retain their gains for themselves, often becoming independently wealthy. With their high economic status, they have likewise perfected disciplined organizations to protect their interests in the markets. These organizations comprise one of the primary price-fixing agencies, prices being set on the basis of supply and demand, with due considerations for the cost of transporting goods to market.¹¹

Politically, stable dynasties were the rule in Africa. There were courts and related institutions to insure the orderly processes of law, "while specialists in warfare saw to it that the territory of the ruler was not only defended in case of attack, but that he could extend his dominion as opportunity afforded."¹²

"The dominant mentality in these great ancient civilizations remained mythical."¹³ In Africa of that period the understanding of the universe was that a life force pervaded and controlled all things.

¹⁰Melville Herskovits, *The Myth of the Negro Past* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1958), p. 61.

¹¹*Ibid.*

¹²*Ibid.*, p. 62.

¹³Cobb, *Structure*, p. 50.

Gods were seen as something to please and fear. The basic understanding of rulers and government was mythical.

Cobb thus sums up the structure of this existence:

It continued to be mythical in the sense that the reflective consciousness continued to be dominantly determined in its comprehensive functioning by the activity of unconscious symbolization. But it gained also extensive autonomy, and that meant that in large segments of its activity it was rational. With the emergence of rationality as an important factor in human existence, a whole new range of possibilities arose.¹⁴

The American Experience

The bringing of slaves from Africa to the new world was the beginning of a new structure of existence for the slaves. There is both continuity and discontinuity with the past as the slaves passed into this new structure of existence.

The first traumatic change in this life was the slave ship and the West Indian sugar fields. The plantation organization brought about a new social structure. The clan and the tribe were destroyed and the white master replaced the chief. The slaves were forced to work long and continuous hours. The old ties of blood relationship disappeared and there appeared a "new polygamy and polyandry, which, in some cases, almost reached promiscuity."¹⁵

Slaves never accepted their position of servitude. There were protests on the west coast of Africa as well as on shipboard. In the

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 51.

¹⁵ William Dubois, "The Souls of Black Folk" in *Three Negro Classics* (New York: Avon, 1965), p. 343.

United States, there were six uprisings for the period between 1663 and 1700, fifty during the eighteenth century, and fifty-three between 1800 and 1864.¹⁶

This describes the panic that swept over the South in 1856.

In the fall of 1856 a series of startling allegations regarding numerous slave insurrections broke the habitual reserve maintained on the topic by the Southern press. Wild rumors of an all-embracing slave plot extending from Delaware to Texas, with execution set for Christmas day, spread through the South. Tales were yet unforgotten of Gabriel's 'Army' attempting to march on Richmond in 1800, of Denmark Vesey's elaborate designs upon Charleston in 1922, of Nat Turner's bloody insurrection at Southhampton, Virginia, in 1831, and of the various other plots and outbreaks that characterized American slavery since the days of the early ship mutinies. Silence in the press could not stem the recurrent fears of insurrection transmitted by the effective 'grapevine' intelligence of the South.¹⁷

Thus the blacks registered their protest against slavery by open revolt.

The black man also registered his protest against slavery in other ways than by open revolt. Methods of slowing down work were used, and the breaking or other misuse of implements furnished by the slave master. "Malingering and temporary escape also were common methods of avoiding slavery. Also suicide, infanticide and poisoning were often resorted to as a means of avoiding slave status."¹⁸ Thus we can see that slaves were not as docile as most people have believed. Their attitude was not one of acquiescence but of resistance.

¹⁶Herskovits, *op. cit.*, p. 97.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, p. 98.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, pp. 101-02.

Dubois states that slavery to the slave was the dark triumph of evil over him.

All the hateful powers of the underworld were striving against him, and a spirit of revolt and revenge filled his heart. He called upon all the resources of [his religion] to aid. Weird midnight orgies and mystic conjurations were invoked, the witch-woman and the voodoo-priest became the center of Negro group life.¹⁹

The slave became unconsciously receptive for a new philosophy of life by the middle of the eighteenth century.²⁰ He was at the bottom of the economic ladder. The gods which he brought from Africa were not working effectively for him. In situations beyond his control such as being conquered by another tribe, there was a pliability in Africa of the mind-set which was also manifested in slavery, the gods of other tribes would be taken over and incorporated into a system already an integrated whole.²¹

The long system of repression and degradation and also their close contact with whites enabled the slaves in the United States to accept Christianity. This flexibility in Negro thought patterns is made clear by a quotation from Herskovits.

This . . . lack of interest the Africans manifest in proselytizing; which in obverse, means that they have no zeal for their own gods so great as to exclude the acceptance of new deities. In this area they themselves recognize this fact, and will readily give an affirmative answer to direct questions concerning the tradition of accepting new gods or, more convincingly, will of their own volition designate certain gods as

¹⁹Dubois, *op. cit.*, p. 343.

²⁰*Ibid.*, p. 344.

²¹Herskovits, *op. cit.*, p. 220.

theirs and indicate other deities they worship as adopted from outside the tribe. For a supernatural power, if he is to be accepted, must justify his existence by accomplishing what his devotees ask of him. He need not be completely effective, for errors in cult practice can always justify why on occasions certain prayers are not fulfilled. If one tribe is conquered by another, it therefore follows that the gods of the conquered, and all considerations dictate that the deities of this folk be added to the less powerful gods already worshipped. Yet . . . an autochthonous god, if not propitiated, may still turn his considerable powers against the conquerors and do them harm.²²

We can see that this conception sanctions a view of the comparative power of gods. Thus when their gods did not function effectively in the new world this enabled the slaves to embrace Christianity. Also these early African thought patterns did not evaluate life in terms of good and bad, white and black, desirable and undesirable. There was a recognition of the fact that there was no absolute good or evil in reality "but that nothing can exert an influence for good without at the very least causing inconvenience elsewhere; that nothing is so evil that it cannot be found to have worked to benefit someone."²³ Life was viewed in a manner which enabled them to adapt to new situations readily. This attitude helps explain why the African was able to take over the conceptions of the universe held by the white man.

Let us now look at how the American slaves understood Christianity. God came to be understood as their companion. The slaves were lonely men and often in their loneliness religion became a

²²*Ibid.*, p. 72.

²³*Ibid.*, pp. 73-74.

solace.²⁴ They spoke of walking and talking with their God.

The slave might respond to his feeling of loneliness by singing:

Sometimes I feel like a motherless child,
Sometimes I feel like a motherless child,
A long ways from home.

Unlike the African who viewed death as a natural consequence of his existence, the slave was constantly faced with the threat of death because of the cheapness with which his life was regarded, of which the overseer was the primary symbol.²⁵ Thus, he incorporated this threat into his view of god and the nature of reality. The spirituals help to give us a deeper understanding of how the slaves viewed death.

Oh freedom! Oh freedom!
Oh freedom! I love thee!
And before I'll be a slave,
I'll be buried in my grave,
And go home to my Lord and be free.

Howard Thurman interprets the above spiritual as a recognition that death cannot be taken from man by any power.²⁶ Thurman goes on to say the following:

If death were not implicit in the fact of life in a time space dimension, in no true sense would there be any authentic options in human experience: This concept regards death merely as a private option, private because it involves the single

²⁴E. Franklin Frazier, *The Negro Church in America* (New York: Shocken, 1966), p. 15.

²⁵Howard Thurman, *The Negro Speaks of Life and Death* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1947), p. 13.

²⁶*Ibid.*, p. 16.

individual as if he and he alone existed in all the universe; option, because while it assumes the inevitability of death as a factor in life, it recognizes the element of time which brings the inevitable factor under some measure of control.²⁷

Death is seen as an option which no slaveholder could take from the slave. Death was also seen as a release from the pains and tribulations of this world. Death was not regarded as the master of life. This gave slaves the power to stand anything that life could bring against them.

The slave showed little fear of death, but talked of it familiarly and sometimes fondly as a crossing of the waters maybe even back to his ancient forests again.²⁸

Dust, dust and ashes, fly over my grave,
But the Lord shall bear my spirit home.

Death means either finality or complete absorption from time space awareness.²⁹ It is seen as a process moving toward fulfillment in which man's potential is further released.

We must also look at how the slaves viewed life. According to Howard Thurman, slaves regarded life as "an experience of evil, of frustration, of despair."³⁰ The spirituals also reflected this despair:

Sometimes I feel like a motherless child,
A long way from home.

²⁷*Ibid.*

²⁸Dubois, *op. cit.*, p. 385.

²⁹Thurman, *op. cit.*, p. 32.

³⁰*Ibid.*

Another song which reflects this same mood is as follows:

Nobody knows the trouble I've seen,
 Nobody knows my sorrow.
 Nobody knows the trouble I've seen,
 Glory, Hallelujah!

There is a strong mood of despair and solitariness. However, the song also ends upon a note of joy as if there is a radical transcendence of suffering. There is a note of triumph.

An example of the quality of triumph that is to be found in the total accent of the song is as follows:

All-a-my troubles will soon be over with,
 All-a-my troubles will soon be over with,
 All over this world.

Here there is a note of hope with the view that life doesn't remain the same. Life is regarded as a pilgrimage where the true home of the spirit is with God.³¹ It is seen as a process in which there are no isolated, unrelated, inconsequential moments. Life is seen in terms of continuity. The individual has no alternative but to participate responsibly in that continuity. The meaning of the spirituals in relation to the understandings of life and death as they throw light upon slavery can be summed up with the words of Dubois:

Through all the sorrow of the sorrow songs there breathes a hope--a faith in the ultimate justice of things. The minor cadences of despair change often to triumph and calm confidence. Sometimes it is faith in life, sometimes a faith in death, sometimes assurance of boundless justice in some fair world beyond. But whichever it is, the meaning is always clear: that sometime, somewhere, men will judge men by their souls and not by their skins.³²

³¹*Ibid.*

³²Dubois, *op. cit.*, p. 386.

In slavery the emerging conscious rationality focused its attention on interpreting Christianity in terms of the increasingly insistent needs of individuals to find freedom from the suffering of isolation and estrangement. Axial man emerged in the process of this quest. Rational reflection gained precedence in the struggle from the pain and suffering of individualization and separateness.

The pain of the human situation was lessened somewhat by the view that present existence is only a small part of the whole and that death would release one from the burden and terror of existence.

In their quest for release from separateness as reflected in the spirituals the slaves shared a common assumption that their existential experience pointed to a reality other than that which was immediately given. The spirituals reflect a thought pattern oriented toward penetrating this world so that man could find his way to reality. Yet, his search for reality did not lessen his determination to physically escape the bondage of slavery. Their quest for individual salvation was bound up with their search for the meaning of death and life.

Thus we see how Christianity was interpreted by the slaves to bear on the problem of salvation in terms of the new experience which confronted them.

Within the African black experience, one's orientation toward God operated within the context of the vision of the world as a manifestation of the Divine. He manifests his power in the sun, moon, stars, storm, rain, and the rainbow.

Here we see God manifested in the world as the source of life. The entire person is involved in a union with the spiritual, and reality is seen as that of being in union with the spiritual which is God. Men do not have reality and importance in themselves apart from the spiritual.

Christianity as perceived and transmitted in the American slave community did not support the African view of the world as a manifestation of the Divine.

The new experience of slavery brought new understandings of life and death. The vision also changed. African religion was characterized by a kind of pantheism which saw 'God *in* the world.' The American vision saw the relationship as 'God *and* the world.'

CHAPTER III

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Perspectives of this Chapter

In the preceding chapter we have looked at two distinct black experiences in terms of their relation to a vision of the world. We have seen how the black man's perception of reality changed with exposure to Christianity. In this chapter I will show how the black man approaches an understanding of God and of evil and how this perception of the world has not changed since slavery. I will make an analysis of concepts of God and of evil as these are presented in Christian education material in the black church and the effects of such concepts upon the black Christian. In order to do this, I will use extracts from Christian education material as printed in Benjamin May, *The Negro God*. The work is important because it provides a necessary historical perspective. The contemporary understanding of the concepts of God and of evil is based upon Christian education literature used in the National Baptist Union and the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church.

The analysis of the effects of these concepts upon the black church is based upon the research of books as well as my own observations of the black church. A primary resource at this point is the interpretation offered by John Cobb in relation to how man approaches his understanding of God.

He indicates five features of man's experience which have played prominent roles in molding different conceptions of God. First, men may be led to speak of God by reflection on the *whole* as the basis for unity and the parts are incomplete elements of the whole pointing to an ever encompassing reality.¹ Secondly, men may be led to speak of God through reflection on the *order* they observe and their search for some cosmic power of intelligence behind it.² Thirdly, men may be led to speak of God through a sense of absolute dependence on something other than themselves.³ Fourthly, men may be led to speak of God through being confronted by the absolute "ought" in their *moral experiences*.⁴ This may be experienced as the will or demand coming from outside of oneself by the transcendent other. Finally, men may speak of God through a more particular religious *experience*.⁵ This could be an experience of the sacred or holy.

Understandings of God in Black Church School Literature

Mays gives a good summary of the results of his analysis of early church literature.

. . . God is omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent. He possesses all the characteristics of human beings. He is represented as cruel, revengeful, and capricious. He is set forth as one who exacts praise and is influenced by it.

¹John B. Cobb, *God and the World* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1969), p. 21.

²*Ibid.*

³*Ibid.*

⁴*Ibid.*

⁵*Ibid.*

But he is also revealed as kind, loving, merciful, and forgiving. The chief idea of God reflected in the literature is that of a God who protects those who are good, guarantees victory for them in their struggles, and punishes those who do not conform to His Way.⁶

Here we see a literal Biblical interpretation of God which is based primarily on the Old Testament. He is anthropomorphic in that he possesses all the characteristics of human beings. God is unlimited in power, in intelligence and he is always present. The image of God as Judge is seen in his power to dispense cruelty or mercy. We also have the image of God as Lawgiver in that his demands are experienced as an absolute ought. The basic approach to God as revealed here is basically that of Cobb's fourth category, namely moral experience.

Let us now look at some original written expressions from early Church School literature.

Our Lord will reward the good and destroy the evil one day. Lost souls shall be turned into a lake that burns with fire and brimstone, a place of endless misery and frenzied despair.

If life is to be saved by doing something on the Lord's Day, there is not sin. But if I am trying to please myself and have fun it is a great sin which God will punish.⁷

Again we see the image of God as the Judge who rewards the good and destroys the evil. God will punish the unfaithful by condemning them to a place of hell. Man's sinfulness is emphasized; here again the approach to God is based upon moral experience.

This literature reveals another approach to an understanding

⁶ Benjamin E. Mays, *The Negro's God* (New York: Antheneum, 1968), p. 89.

⁷ *Ibid.*

of God as well.

God our Heavenly Father knows what is necessary for you and will provide it. It is God who provides the necessities of life anyway, and why not give Him the glory, and put more faith in Him and stop worrying about such matters. . . . We know that most people are more concerned over eating and drinking and dressing than anything else, especially spiritual things, and He is showing how foolish it is, for God will take care of them, for it is God who cares for them after all and there is no need to worry and fret over such matters.⁸

Here we have the image of God as Father who knows our needs and will provide for them. There is a sense here of absolute dependence upon God which can lead to a lessening of one's taking the initiative in involving oneself in the world. The basic approach is through an absolute dependence upon God. A further illustration may be cited.

Just a word about Ananias. God used him as His great agent to lead Saul to the light, God always has used some person to do His work. God will do all that human beings cannot do, then He turns the balance over to men. God did for Saul what Ananias could not do. Then He turned Saul over to Ananias who acted as His agent and started Saul on the most remarkable career of any man in human history. God can use us if we put ourselves in position. If we have talents and gifts and graces, all we have to do is to ask God as Saul did: 'Lord What Wilt Thou Have Me To Do?'⁹

Again we see man's absolute dependence upon God to fulfill his potential. There is also danger lessening man's worth in that man has to ask God to enable him to develop his talents to the fullest. Man does not come of age under a God as portrayed above.

The next quotation portrays God as the source of all life and shows that we are obligated to Him.

⁸*Ibid.*, p. 91.

⁹*Ibid.*, p. 92.

No man giveth himself life; no man can give himself the things that make for life, nor sustain life. If a man lives he lives not of himself nor for himself. He is obligated in life both to his Life Giver and to others who are in fellowship within the same gifts. There is a divine value in human life and every recipient is under obligation to God to respect that value, for all human life is precious unto Him.

. . . We are bound to Him, while we live, to be just to every human creature, even to our own lives. . . . If we adopt the Christ ideal of life we will feel a loving urge for our brother's welfare that will restrain us from voting for the return of the system or kingdom of liquor to our land, lest it may contribute to his downfall rather than his salvation. . . . Thus man is eternally obligated to God, not only as his life-giver, but to his fellowman who is possessor of the same life and interest to God as that which he himself has.¹⁰

Here, God is revealed in creation with human life having intrinsic value which each man should respect out of obligation to God. Man is also challenged to bring about social righteousness. The destiny of one individual or group is interwoven with that of another individual or group. There is also the image of God as law-giver in that there are certain things man "ought" to do such as being obligated in life to our fellowman in the same sense that Jesus felt his obligation to die to better the conditions of human life.¹¹ Thus we can see also that an approach to God based upon a sense of absolute dependence can be combined with an understanding of God in terms of moral experience. A slightly different combination is also possible.

Our Father in Heaven, we thank Thee for the bountiful mercies; and are grateful for the forgiveness of our sins. And we pray that Thou wouldst so fix our hearts that we will work together with Thee, and so live that we may become worthy factors in bringing in that peace which the world so much needs, and which

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 95.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

Thou didst send Thy Son and our Saviour to bring with our assistance. We are asking these things in the name of our Saviour, Christ Jesus. Amen.¹²

The above approach to God is through the religious experience with God as the Holy One who is distant from man and the world and radically transcends the world. God understood in the above prayer does not lead men away from the world but toward a greater participation in the world bringing about peace, justice, and a cooperative society.

The approaches discussed above are those reflected in early black church school literature. These were primarily based in understandings of God in terms of moral experience, absolute dependency and religious experience. This early church literature did not attempt to confront the problem of evil per se. Fundamentally, God was viewed as good and all-powerful and evil was described in terms of human sin.

1. "What did they do? The woman ate the forbidden fruit and gave it to the man, who likewise ate."
2. "What did they become then? Sinners."
3. "What then happened to them? God was displeased with them and drove them from the garden."
4. "For what reason were they driven from the garden? That they might not eat of the tree of life and live forever."
5. "Was any curse put upon them? Yes; that they should work hard all their lives."
6. "Did the curse extend any further? Yes; that they should have sickness, pain and death."¹³

The above questions were asked at the end of a lesson on the parable of the kingdom. The questions are based on the Old Testament.

¹²*Ibid.*, p. 94.

¹³*Ibid.*, p. 89.

Evil in the world is seen as God's punishment for sin. Let us now examine approaches to God in contemporary black church school literature.

"When people put God first, they need not worry again about anything. If God can take care of all other creatures in the world surely He cares for man who is made in His own image."¹⁴ This presents an image of God as creator.

God and Christ may be fused together as creator in this image. "Not only is Christ the same God who created the world and everything in it, he is the saving power of the world. He still holds it together."¹⁵ This approach to God is an example of Cobb's second category. It is developed through reflection upon the natural order.

"God is at the foundation of all of life. If God is at the foundation of all of life, men need have no fears concerning the unfavorable circumstances around them or the unknown future before them."¹⁶ This reflects an understanding of God in terms of dependence.

God sends the blessings of life out to the just men and the unjust men. God sends sunlight upon godly men and the ungodly men. God provides food for those who love Him and those who care not. God is generous and kind to all people.¹⁷

This dependence upon God for existence is made explicit in the above quotation.

¹⁴Theresa B. Higgins, *Primary Bible Lessons*, LV:4 (1970), 23.

¹⁵E. K. Reagin, *Young People and Adult Quarterly*, I:3 (1970), 23.

¹⁶*Ibid.*

¹⁷Higgins, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

. . . God is the judge who is in control of this world, even when it becomes rebellious. Those who create doubt and those who yield to its suggestion are alike under his judgment. Man can choose to disobey God, but he cannot escape the consequences which God in his mercy and justice will inevitably bring about.¹⁸

This is an example of another approach to an understanding of God. It is through the moral experience. This understanding is experienced as an absolute ought in images of God as law-giver and judge.

The approach to an understanding of God revealed here is through the religious experience in terms of the Holy. "God's hand sometimes leads in mysterious ways, sometimes in quite natural ways, sometimes in ways that do not seem to be God's hand at all."¹⁹

We have looked at the different ways God is spoken of in contemporary black Christian education. The primary direction of these approaches is to emphasize man's helplessness, dependency, sinfulness, and worthlessness. Cobb indicates the problem in approaches of this kind.

To believe in God is often to disparage man and his capacities, to resign oneself to what occurs as good despite its apparent evil, and to repress one's spontaneity and vital feelings in obedience to an external demand.²⁰

However, these different ways can also have positive meanings for man.

The understanding of God as the whole can lead to the sense of participation in the divine Being. Knowing God as the Source of order has led to a faith in pattern and meaning

¹⁸Reagin, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, p. 37.

²⁰Cobb, *op. cit.*, p. 30.

behind the apparent disorder and meaninglessness of phenomena, a faith that has helped make the sciences possible. Experiencing God as Ground of being has undergirded the conviction that the world and its history matter ultimately because they matter to God. The awareness of God as confronted in moral experience has given man a sense of his uniqueness and dignity as a moral being who thereby transcends nature and is capable of fellowship with God. The experience of God as the one Holy One has served to empty the world of numinous terror and freed man to conquer and to rule it. In these and other ways the understanding of God as creator, Lord of history, Lawgiver, Judge, and Holy One has served to ennoble and free man as well as to restrict and repress him.²¹

Let us now see how the contemporary black church views evil.

Separation from depending upon God is seen as responsible for evil. "Separation from the presence and the will of God has brought friction which is resulting in hatred and destruction all over the world."²²

There is also ultimate meaning in suffering and the triumph of good over evil.

Could it not be that our Lord allows some of His children to bear the burden of suffering or sorrow in order to enable them to go to others in understanding. . . . Thank God, thank God, that even on the darkest road of life there is the certainty of ultimate triumph of good . . . if we but heed His voice and walk in the light of His work.²³

Evil is seen as the defiance of divine law.

The story of Adam and Eve is the account of man's first defiance of divine law. Thereafter men, in the unredeemed world, will struggle with good and evil, striving toward the time when they will be ultimately reconciled with God and their fellow men.²⁴

²¹*Ibid.*

²²Reagin, *op. cit.*, p. 27.

²³*Intermediate Sunday School Lessons*, LV:4 (1970), 12.

²⁴Reagin, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

We can also see the experience of the Holy in God's defeat of evil. "God is God; sin is sin; and the two cannot continue to exist together. Since God is supreme, sin must eventually be defeated."²⁵

As in early church school literature, the contemporary black church is not dealing adequately with the problem of evil. Evil is described in terms of human sin.

Effects of Approaches to God and Evil Upon the Black Church

What effects have the understanding of God in the black church had upon man's fullest and responsible development? A study of the material of the black church school reveals that the effects of these understandings have had both positive and negative dimensions. On the one hand they have contributed to the advancement of the race; on the other hand, they have obstructed the development of the black man's fullest potential.

The black church is basically dedicated to freedom, expression, independence, and the advancement of the race. It has not always been able to externalize the advancement of the race in concrete applications because of the dominant oppressive structures of white society. Thus it turned in upon itself for survival. The centrality of sin became the dominant influence in theology. Theology became other-worldly in that there was despair in finding benefits in this world.

²⁵*Ibid.*, p. 27.

The world was seen as rushing toward a cosmic catastrophe ordained by God. The natural depravity of man was stressed in the desire to seek freedom from the desires of the temptation of flesh. There was nothing one could do to overcome the depraved self. There was also the seeking of spiritual endowments as expressed in pentecostal sects. We find the idea that punishment results because of past misdeeds or being tested by God. Basically the theology was that of survival based upon eschatological hope. Romans 8:18-25 was interpreted as a means of saying that there is ultimate meaning to suffering.

(18) Present suffering, I hold, is a mere nothing compared to the (19) glory that we are to have revealed. Even the creation waits with eager longing for the sons of God to be revealed.

(20) I or creation was not rendered futile by its own choice, but by the will of Him who thus made it subject, the (21) hope being that creation as well as man would one day be freed from its thralldom to decay and gain the glorious (22) freedom of the children of God. To this day, we know, (23) the entire creation sighs and throbs with pain; and not only so, but even we ourselves, who have the Spirit as a foretaste of the future, even we sigh to ourselves as we wait for the redemption of the body that means our full sonship. We were saved with this hope in view. Now (24) when an object of hope is seen, there is no further need to hope. Who ever hopes for what he sees already? But (25) if we hope for something that we do not see, we wait for it patiently.²⁶

The above passage has been interpreted literally and allegorically to justify suffering. It sums up the attitude of most black Christians in that the Lord is going to make a way somehow. It is an affirmation that that which we suffer now is only temporal. It has given hope but has lessened man's maturation. It has led many young

²⁶C. H. Dodd, *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1932), p. 132.

blacks to blame God for the evils of the world and has resulted in turning away from the church. Many middle class blacks feel that they only have use for the church as a social institution. The following ideas were brought out by Drake and Cayton on a study of Negro life.

Many people who attend church offer no religious reasons at all in explaining their behavior. They attend church, they say, because they 'like good singing' and 'good speaking' or because the services are 'restful and beautiful.' Both members and non-members expect the church to play a prominent part in 'advancing the Race,' and they often judge the institutions from this angle alone.²⁷

This attitude among the black church members is related to the theological understandings of the black clergy. Let us now look at a sociological study by Gerhard Lenski.

A study by Gerhard Lenski brought out that there are indications that in the next twenty or thirty years there will be a weakening of the black protestant churches.²⁸ Lenski writes that among black protestants who have attended college that fewer attended church regularly percentage wise when compared with those who have not attended college.²⁹ This trend promises decreased associational involvement of blacks in the church as their educational level rises or when they reach middle class. The opposite is true of white protestant and

²⁷ St. Clair Drake and Horace R. Cayton, *Black Metropolis* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), II, 423-24.

²⁸ Gerhard Lenski, *The Religious Factor* (New York: Doubleday, 1963), p. 327.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 51.

Catholic churches according to the study.³⁰

The increasing tendency of married women working out of the home is having serious consequences for the black protestant church. Among black protestant married women who were not employed, fifty-six percent reported weekly attendance at services.³¹ By contrast, only thirty-five percent of the working wives reported weekly attendance.³² The increasing tendency of married women not attending church may be due to the new sense of independence that women experience working and not the black church's theology. In the black family, the wife and mother plays the key role in stimulating religious interest and activity. This factor cannot be ignored in looking at the future of the black church.

Black Protestantism is currently becoming the religion of an oppressed urban proletariat which exists in an environment that provides minimal opportunities for development.

In this chapter I have looked at ways in which God is thought of in the Christian education curriculum. We have seen how our basic understanding of God is determined by factors of thought and experience rather than as revealed in Jesus Christ. We have looked at some of the effects of these views of God upon the black man. We have found that in many ways when God is viewed in such a manner it does not allow for the full maturation of man. Also many young and middle class blacks blame God, as so understood, for black oppression and therefore

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *Ibid.*

have no use for Him. We see that there is an indication of a weakening of the black church which I am sure is influenced by its theology. It appears that the black church must reconceive God in a way which is compatible with the black experience and in the light of the revelation which it has always affirmed.

CHAPTER IV

JOB IN LIGHT OF THE BLACK EXPERIENCE

Job and the Black Experience

Frederick Sontag, in *The God of Evil*, has shown that part of the reason that man rejects God is the presence of destructive forces. Sontag writes:

We often reject God in order to explain the presence of destructive powers. That being done, we are faced with the need to explain why and how we are able to resist the total subversion of life by evil. Having given the Devil his due, how can we explain what he cannot explain, if we grant that we first introduced the Devil to explain what a simple, good God could not account for?¹

The theological crisis in the black church is in part due to an inadequate explanation of evil forces in the world which has led to a rejection of God among many blacks. One might ask, what does Job have to say about the problem?

First, we have the black man's search for identity in which he is taking a clear look at himself and relating with honesty and integrity with others as well as himself. It is the stripping of the masks in society. It is creating self-acceptance in the black man. According to Terrien, the poet of Job strips the masks of moralism and the ecclesiasticism of all ages.²

¹Frederick Sontag, *The God of Evil* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), p. 111.

²Samuel Terrien, *Job* (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1957), p. 16.

Second, the Negro spiritual has exposed the raw fabric of the black man's loneliness and the black writer man's inhumanity to his fellowman. They have plumbed the depth of the "foreign land" in which we live. The depth of his existence is recognized, for example, in the words of Langston Hughes,

I've known rivers:
 I've known rivers ancient as the world and older
 than the flow of human blood in human veins.
 My soul has grown deep like the rivers.

Here we see a picture of the human situation which speaks to the agony and despair of the black experience. Job can speak to the black situation as the black man tries to fathom the evils which he has experienced.

According to Terrien, Job can speak to this generation "which has pierced the bubbles of nineteenth-century belief in the infinite capacity of man for goodness through the spread of education and technology."³

Third, black scholars are revolting against systems of interpretation and knowledge that came out of the Renaissance or the Enlightenment. They are asking existential questions which come out of the black condition in order to grasp reality as lived. Job speaks to this situation. The poet of Job dealt with existential questions, "spurned traditional answers and risked theological death in order to confront life in the raw."⁴

Fourth and last, the black Christian is confronted with the

³*Ibid.*, p. 17.

⁴*Ibid.*, p. 18.

issues of faith as related to the black liberation struggle. How do we see God within the liberation struggle? We cannot justify the worship of God on the basis of pragmatic success and still appeal to the Bible. That is idolatry. According to Terrien:

God is not the projection of man's idea of goodness or security. 'Doth Job fear God for nought?' This is the satanic question which is answered in the negative by those who think they must support the church because it is the cornerstone of democracy, a buttress of moral character, a source of peace for the mind--or is it for the soul?--and a technique for the pursuit of happiness.⁵

Culture awareness is a relative means toward an absolute end: "the purpose of a creative God in the universe"⁶ and how we respond to participation in the creative act.

The book of Job is one of the most misunderstood writings of the whole Bible. Usually one speaks of the patience of Job which shows a vague acquaintance with the poem (3:1-42:6). It has been praised as a highly literary masterpiece dealing with the problem of innocent suffering. But was the poet's purpose to discover the mystery of suffering? How does the author's purpose enlighten an understanding of God and evil within the black experience?

In order to answer these questions one must ask the following questions: How and when was the document written? What was the purpose of the writing? What is its place within the Scripture? What is its relevance for the contemporary black Christian?

⁵*Ibid.*, p. 19.

⁶*Ibid.*, p. 20.

The Name and Place of the Book in the Canon

The book of Job receives its name from the leading character, *yyobb*, which has been "Hellenisticized" into *IrB* and Latinized into *Job*.⁷

The Book of Job is found in the Hebrew manuscripts among the Hagiographa or Sacred writings. There have been discrepancies among the various traditions as to its proper position in the Hagiographa. The Babylonian Talmud, in the treatise *Baba Bathra* (14b)⁸ after the prophets, gives the order of the writing as Ruth, Psalms, Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, Lamentations, Daniel, Esther, Ezra and Chronicles.

Two groups of manuscripts, according to Elias Levita of the sixteenth century, may be distinguished: those of the *Sephardin*, who were faithful to the Massoretes, followed the order Chronicles, Psalms, Job, Proverbs, Ruth; those of the *Ashkenazim* who followed the order Psalms, Proverbs, Job.⁹ Psalms, Job and Proverbs form a group.

Melito of Sardis places the Book of Job between the Song of Songs and the Prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah; the Twelve, Daniel, Ezekiel, and Ezra.¹⁰ Origin places Job after Ezekiel and is followed by

⁷Samuel Terrien, "The Book of Job," in *The Interpreter's Bible* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1954), III, 877.

⁸E. Dhorme, *Job* (London: Nelson, 1967), p. vii.

⁹*Ibid.*, p. viii.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, p. x.

Esther and Maccabees.¹¹ The order is Psalms, Job, Proverbs in codex Alexandrius but Cyril of Jerusalem, Jerome, Epiphanius, Rufinus, and the Apostolic Canons follow the order Job, Psalms, Proverbs.¹² This order is maintained by the vulgate generally today and was fixed by the Council of Trent.

Subject and Literary Form

The Book of Job, in popular opinion, is a story of a man's suffering and vindication before God. It basically deals with a man's struggle in understanding life and religion. The book is divided into five parts: Samuel Terrien divides the book as follows: (a) a prologue (1:1-2:13); (b) a poetic discussion (3:1-31:40); (c) the Elihu speeches (32:1-37:24); the speeches of Yahweh to Job, and the latter's repentance (38:1-42:6); (e) an epilogue (42:7-17).¹³

In the prologue, Job is presented as a righteous person as well as a man of prosperity. His righteousness is represented by the Satan as self-interest which helps him to prosper. God gives Satan permission to put him to the test and his family and possessions are taken away. Job is later struck with a painful disease but keeps his integrity of character.

In the poem three friends come to comfort him. Job breaks

¹¹*Ibid.*

¹²Marvin H. Pope, *Job* (New York: Doubleday, 1965), p. xxxix.

¹³Terrien, "The Book of Job," pp. 877-78.

out in a speech in which he laments his lot and the day he was born. Each of the friends speaks, chastising Job with Job replying to each. There are two more cycles of speeches. The friends, in their speeches, assume Job is being punished for some wickedness which Job repudiates. Job appeals to God to vindicate him, which is followed later by another appeal. Elihu appears on the scene and makes four speeches one after the other and vanishes from the scene. Now, God appears and answers Job in a speech from the whirlwind. God does not explain Job's suffering but displays the mystery of creation which is beyond Job's understanding. At the end Job says he will complain no more.

There has been a great deal of discussion of the literary form of the Book of Job. Some students of the Book say that it is drama such as Theodore of Mopsuestia in the fourth century who regarded Job as being modeled on the Greek dramas.¹⁴ Freehof believes that much of the Book of Job is dramatic in nature but further states that the Dialogues are undramatic therefore the book is not a drama.¹⁵

Job is classified by some writers as an epic. An epic deals with the events in the life of a hero who embodies the character of a people. But the Book of Job does not deal with historical events although it deals with a traditional hero. The author of Job was probably not Jewish and was not concerned with embodying the life of Israel in the hero, Job. Job cannot be classified as an epic.

¹⁴Pope, *op. cit.*, p. xxix.

¹⁵Solomon B. Freehof, *Book of Job* (New York: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1965), p. 7.

Job has also been classified as a didactic poem. Freehof states that Job is not truly a didactic poem because the lesson of Job is cloudy and vague and that it is difficult to find a clear-cut instructional purpose.

There is no single classification appropriate to the literature of Job. It has characteristics of all the literary forms mentioned but it cannot be classified as epic, drama or didactic poetry. The book is *sui generis*, and no term or combination of terms can describe it.¹⁶

Language and Poetic Structure

Original Tongue. The Book of Job presents many linguistic and philological difficulties. There are many rare words and words which occur only once than in any other biblical book. Many of these words according to Pope can be explained from cognates of the semitic languages.¹⁷ The problems of Job are also morphological and syntactic. The Edomitic character of the story has led critics such as Voltaire, Herder, and Renan to suggest that the poem echoes the famed wisdom of Edom. It has also been supposed that the author was an Edomite and not a Jew. The dialect is closely related to Hebrew.

The view that the Book of Job is a translated book and difficult to interpret like any translated book was first made by Abraham

¹⁶*Ibid.*, p. 9.

¹⁷Pope, *op. cit.*, p. xliii.

ibn Ezra. Some later scholars also echo this view. Aramaic has been suggested as the original language. There are a number of words in Job not found elsewhere in the Old Testament but many have been explained from Arabic. Some scholars explain this fact in that Arabic is the best known and richest vocabulary of the Semitic languages. Although there may be linguistic evidence to support the view that Job is a translation it is seemingly improbable.

It is generally held that there is a strong Aramaic color in the language of Job. There are phonological and morphological features that are characteristically Aramaic. Hebrew and Aramaic words are juxtaposed as synonyms in the poetic parallelism. The Aramaic influence on Hebrew has led some scholars to classify Hebrew as a hybrid speech. The Israeli scholar Tur-Sinai suggests that we have not a hybrid language but a partial translation from an Aramaic original.¹⁸

In the words of Tur-Sinai:

The Language of the Book of Job is a mixed one, not in the sense that its Hebrew is a mixed language, but that two languages, Hebrew and Aramaic are used in it (and not in the speech of its time) side by side. However, much of the language of the Book of Job may have contributed to the development of Hebrew, it is not, as it is, material for a description of biblical Hebrew, neither as to grammar nor vocabulary.¹⁹

According to Tur-Sinai, the original language of Job is Babylonian Aramaic and not later than the sixth century B.C. and some generations

¹⁸ N. H. Tur-Sinai, *The Book of Job* (Jerusalem: Kiryath Sepher, 1957), pp. xxx-xi.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. xxxv-xxxvi.

later the incomplete translation was made into Hebrew.

The presence of numerous Aramaic elements in the Book of Job cannot be denied but no satisfactory explanation has yet been given for the strong Aramaic element in the language of Job. It is best, in light of the facts, to do what we can with the text as we now have it. Ugaritic texts have added a great deal to the knowledge of early northwest semitic poetry and further discoveries will contribute more information.

Style. The author is unsurpassed in the Old Testament as to literary mastery. We have aphorisms such as 6:14. "A sick man should have the loyalty of his friend, even if he renounce fear of Shaddai."²⁰ He could use rhetorical questions such as 22:2. "Can a man benefit God, even a sage man benefit him?"²¹

He was adept in the genre of the lament (as in 3:3), "Damn the day I was born, the night that said, 'A boy is begot'"²² or of that of the doxology (as in 9:4). "Be he clever or mighty, who could defy him unharmed?"²³ He used the whole range of tones; he could be coarse (as in 15:2), "Ought a wise man to answer with wind, fill his belly with serocco?"²⁴ He is vehement in 16:18, "O earth, cover not my blood, that there be no tomb for my pliant"²⁵ or humorous (as in 17:16) "Will it go down to Sheol with me? Shall we descent to the dust

²⁰Pope, *op. cit.*, p. 49.

²¹*Ibid.*, p. 149.

²²*Ibid.*, p. 26.

²³*Ibid.*, p. 9.

²⁴*Ibid.*, p. 106.

²⁵*Ibid.*, p. 115.

together?"²⁶ or tender (as in 14:13ff.) "O that you would hide me in Sheol, conceal me till your anger past, then set me a time and remember me."²⁷

His versatility of style included a sense of the beauty of nature which he used as vivid imagery. He talked about swollen streams, thunderstorms and desert hurricanes. He could transcend the human lack of perspective.

Metrical Forms. The poetic form of Job has periodically aroused debate. There is a whole school of scholars, following Scaliger, who contest the very existence of rhythm, among the Hebrews. The Massoretic accentuation, was a special system devised for accents for Psalms, Proverbs and Job in conformity with Hebrew tradition. According to Dhorme, the distinction between prose which was intended to be read and poetry which was intended to be sung was recognized. This brings us to the question of what does the metric unit consist?

Terrien suggests that the colon constitutes the essential element of the line and consists of a clause or sentence containing two, three, or even four beats of accented syllables.²⁸ Two cola (bicolon or couplet) and occasionally three cola (tricolon or triac)

forms the line creating a wide variety of combinations such as 2+2,

²⁶*Ibid.*, p. 120.

²⁷*Ibid.*, p. 100.

²⁸Terrien, "The Book of Job," p. 893.

2+3, 3+2, 3+3, 2+2+2, possible also 3+4, 4+4, 4+3.²⁹ Meters are connected with the ideas which may be repeated colon to colon (synonymous parallelism), developed by contrast (antithetic parallelism) amplified (synthetic parallelism) or qualified (restrictive parallelism).³⁰ A few examples of other rhythms are as follows:

- (a) Synonymous parallelism in 2+2: 11:7 "Can you *fathom* the depth of God, *Find* the limits of *Shaddai*?"
- (b) Restrictive parallelism in 2+3: 22:2 "Can a *man* benefit *God*, [even] a *sage* man *benefit* him?"
- (c) Antithetic parallelism in 4+4: 3:3 "*Damn* the *day* I was *born*, The *night* that *said*, 'A *boy* is *begot*.'"

Parallel Literature

Edomitic Wisdom. The characters of the Book are located in Edom and it is possible that Israel received the story from the Edomites. Terrien suggests that it is possible that the divine name Eloah used in the poetic discussion, which is extremely rare elsewhere in the Bible, is an indication of familiarity with Teman in Edom.³¹ Agur (see Prov. 30:5), an Arabian sage, uses Eloah and his language is thought to be Edomitic. Job 26:8 and 38:5 may answer the questions of Agur in Proverbs 30:4.

²⁹*Ibid.*

³⁰*Ibid.*

³¹*Ibid.*, p. 879.

Job: 26:8 "He blinds the waters in nimbus, But the clouds
burst not with the burden." 38:5 "Who drafted its
dimensions? Do you know? Who stretched the line
over it?"

Proverbs: 30:4 "Who was it that ascended into heaven, and
came down again? Who gathered the wind in his fists?
Who bound the waters in a garment? Who set up all
the ends of the earth? What is his name, and what is
his son's name, if thou knowest it?"³²

We also find in Proverbs a remnant of an ancient wisdom poet
which is similar to Job. Again we look at Proverbs 30:104 structurally
according to Tur-Sinai and also his translation.³³

A) Question of God to man, called . . . 'the speech (of God)'
(v 4) Who hath ascended up into heaven, or descended? Who
hath gathered the wind in his fists? Who hath bound the waters
in a garment? Who hath established all the ends of the earth?
What is his name and what is his son's name, if thou canst tell?

B) A man's confession . . . vv. 16 c-3 (1) I am helpless, O
God, I am helpless and consumed. (2) Surely I am more brutish
than any man, and have not the understanding of a man. (3) I
neither learned wisdom, nor have the knowledge of the holy.

Tur-Sinai believes that these questions are only intelligible
within the context of a book such as Job. These observations are not
weighty enough to conclude that the author of the book was Edomite.

International Folklore. The theme of the righteous man who

³²Isaac Leeser, *The Twenty-Four Books of the Holy Scriptures*
(Cincinnati: Bloch, 1894), p. 994.

³³Tur-Sinai, *op. cit.*, p. lix.

suffers is found in Indian literature. It was first told in the Markandeya Purana.³⁴ The gods and goddesses assembled in the heaven of Indra. A question arose as to whether there was a man on earth perfectly righteous. Most of the gods felt that such a one did not exist, but the goddess Vasishtha was perfect. The god Shiva ("the destroyer") doubted that Hariscandra was perfect and tested him with a series of calamities like Job's. Hariscandra was submitted to all sorts of trials, depriving him of his wealth, his kingdom, his wife, and only son, but he preserved his virtue and was at last restored and rewarded. Most scholars doubt the direct interdependence between the stories of Hariscandra and Job.

Egyptian Pessimism. The literary form of Job is quite common in Egypt. It is not unusual to find a prologue and epilogue with poetic dialogue. We have a text which presents a debate of a man with his soul on whether to commit suicide when life has become intolerable. Like Job, he fell sick and consequently endured all kinds of ill treatment. In his affliction, he decides to die but his soul opposes his determination. Like Job, the man longs for an advocate among the gods to plead his case before the divine tribunal. The following lament is of the Egyptian hero.³⁵

[One's] fellows are evil;
The friends of today to not love . . .
Hearts are rapacious:

³⁴Pope, *op. cit.*, p. lxiv.

³⁵*Ibid.*, p. li.

Every man seizes his fellow's goods. . . .
 The gentle man has perished,
 [But] the violent man has access to everybody.
 Goodness is rejected everywhere . . .
 There are no righteous;
 The land is left to those who do wrong.
 To whom can I speak today?
 I am laden with wretchedness
 For lack of an intimate [friend].
 To whom can I speak today?
 The sin which treads the earth,
 it has no end.³⁶

The weary sufferer looks upon death as the escape from the dark miseries of life.

Death is in my sight today
 Like the odor of myrrh
 Like sitting under an awning
 on a breezy day.³⁷

The Egyptian "Tale of the Eloquent Peasant," from the early second millennium has a similar literary form to that of Job. A prose prologue and epilogue introduce and conclude the text with the central portion composed of nine semi-poetic appeals for justice on the part of the eloquent peasant. The wronged peasant appeals to the chief steward but his complaint is brushed aside. The persistent peasant refuses to change his plea and is bold in his seeking for justice even though he may be put to death. Justice triumphs, and the peasant is rewarded with the property of the one who has robbed him. Although the issue here is justice, and the peasant's complaint is against his fellow man, still the attitude of the peasant is similar to that of Job.

³⁶*Ibid.*

³⁷Terrien, *op. cit.*, p. 880.

Babylonian Skepticism. Critics have looked to Akkadian literature in an effort to find possible sources of the Book of Job. The best known parallel is the text with the title "I Will Praise the Lord of Wisdom." It is sometimes called the Poem of the Righteous Sufferer, or the Babylonian Job. It is a psalm of thanksgiving where the leading character is stricken by disease and consults the gods for the cause of his misfortune but receives no answer. He is mocked by his friends and ultimately restored by the god Marduk. Several ideas which parallel with those in Job may be recognized.

The sufferer first describes his condition.

. . . I am like a deaf man.
 Although I was powerful, I am becoming a slave. . . .
 By day, sighing, by night, weeping;
 Monthly lament; sorrow each year.

 If I look around me, [there is] evil, evil!
 Oppression has increased upon me, I do not see my right.³⁸

He receives no answer from his god and goddess.

I have cried to the god, but he did not show his face.
 I have invoked my goddess, but she did not lift up her head.³⁹

He stands fast in opposing the idea that suffering is a punishment for sin or ritual failure.

As if I had not set aside the libation for the god,
 And had not, at meal-time, remembered my goddess,
 Had not bowed my face, and had not [made] adoration.⁴⁰

The Babylonian poet goes on to describe his piety, accuses the deity with apathy, and is filled with a strong sense of pessimism

³⁸*Ibid.*

³⁹*Ibid.*

⁴⁰*Ibid.*

concerning human destiny. It would be difficult to gain theological insights from the Babylonian story. Many persons throughout the ages have cried out to God for relief from suffering. It is possible that the biblical poet was acquainted with the Babylonian story but no literary dependence on the part of Job can be traced to it.

Old Testament Affinities. The author of Job probably drew upon a common literary tradition. Job is probably closer to the story of Ruth than to any other biblical narrative.⁴¹ We find a sizable portion of Job's discourses classified as lament (3:3-26, 6:2-7:21, 9:25-10:22, 16:6-17:9, 19:7-20, 23, 39:1-31:37).⁴² We find in the Psalms laments, for example, 22:2-19, 38.⁴³ We find in Job, for example, 9:4-12, 12:13-25, and 34:18-20 hymns. In the Hebrew Psalter Psalm 104 has many contacts with Job (Psalm 104:6-9 with Job 38:8-11; Psalm 104:21, 27 with Job 38:39-41; Psalm 104:32 with Job 9:5).⁴⁴

We find proverbial sayings, for example, in 5:1-7, 12:11-12 and 14:1-2.

We find the doctrine that righteousness brings prosperity and wickedness misfortune in life with regard to the nations in Exodus (23:20ff., Leviticus 26, Deuteronomy 28, Jeremiah 7:5-7), and it is also applied to the individual (in the Book of Proverbs, and in Psalm 1, 37, 49; Jeremiah 17:5-8). That this view was orthodox in some circles is clear but to take it as normative for the Old Testament is

⁴¹Pope, *op. cit.*, p. lxvii.

⁴²*Ibid.*

⁴³*Ibid.*

⁴⁴*Ibid.*

to ignore a great deal that contradicts it. When we read how Cain and Abel offered sacrifices to God and that Abel's sacrifice was pleasing while Cain's was not; we read that Cain later murdered Abel, it is clear that the writer was not inferring that Abel got what he deserved (Gen. 4:4).

We also read that Uriah the Hittite was murdered through the design of David and the prophet Nathan rebuked him in the name of God. The prophet Elizah denounces Ahab for the Judicial murder of Naboth, which Jezebel had staged in name. The reader is not expected to believe that Naboth died innocently. To accept the doctrine enunciated by Job's friends as the orthodox view of Yahwism is to ignore a great deal of the Old Testament.

Overview of the Book of Job

In this section I will offer the reader an overview of the Book of Job and on the basis of the overview emphasize some perspectives later to be shown as relevant for contemporary black experience. I will accept Pope's translation of Job for textual citations.

Prologue. In the Prologue, Job is presented as a righteous person as well as a man of prosperity. At a session of the divine assembly Yahweh calls to the Satan's attention the righteousness of Job which the Satan calls self-interest. The Satan answered Yahweh as follows in Chapter I.

- 9 The Satan answered Yahweh:
- 'Does Job fear God for nought?
- 10 Have you not hedged him round,

Him and his household
 And everything he has?
 His efforts you have blessed,
 And his property has increased in the land.
 11 Just reach out and strike what he has,
 And he will curse you to your face.'

The Satan asks a rhetorical question. He is sure that the answer is in the negative. The question is, Does Job serve God for God's sake or for other reasons? Roger Carstensen suggests that the Satan senses a challenge in God's assertion that Job is an upright man. In the words of Carstensen, Yahweh responds,

'Yeah, I've seen him. . . . Huh! Mama's little boy! Teacher's pet! I'm not impressed! You have showered every blessing on him; you have built a hedge around him so that he cannot be harmed. Of course he's righteous! Who wouldn't be? Satan himself would undoubtedly be pious were it this profitable!'⁴⁵

Dhorme interprets 1:9 as Satan asserting that man's moral conduct is dictated by self-interest and that the trials are an attempt, by the author, to prove that it is for nothing that the hero of the story is upright.⁴⁶ Does Job serve God for the sake of God is a basic question to the understanding of this Book.

The Satan gets permission from Yahweh to test Job. Satan takes away his possessions and his children. Job continues to uphold his faith. Satan gets permission to inflict a painful disease upon Job. His wife urges him to curse God and die but Job responds as follows in 2:10:

⁴⁵Roger N. Carstensen, *Job* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1963), p. 40.

⁴⁶Dhorme, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

'You talk like a foolish woman. Shall we accept good from God, and not accept evil?'

Job has accepted the loss of his children and family. He accepts illness, for evil as well as good comes from Yahweh. Job is also saying Yahweh is responsible for evil. Terrien states that God's apparent evil could not make Job forget God's good.⁴⁷ Tur-Sinai interprets "Shall we accept good from God, and not accept evil" as part of that "life-philosophy in which the ancients found solace, and which is not exclusively Israelitic or Edomitic."⁴⁸

Let us now look at verse 2:6 which is as follows:

Yahweh said to the Satan: 'Here, he is in your power; only spare his life.'

Here Yahweh gives up some of his power to Satan within certain limitations. Pope states that the Satan is given permission to get under Job's skin, to do anything to him except extinguish his life.⁴⁹

The Prologue ends with Job's three friends coming to visit. They sat with him seven days and seven nights without saying a word.

The major emphases of the Prologue are as follows:

1. Can one's relationship with God be one of wholeness.
2. God surrenders some of his power to the Satan.
3. God sends both good and evil.

Dialogue. Job breaks the silence in a speech in which he

⁴⁷Terrien, "The Book of Job," p. 922.

⁴⁸Tur-Sinai, *op. cit.*, p. 27.

⁴⁹Pope, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

laments his lot and the day he was born.

3 "Damn the day I was born,
The night that said, 'A boy is begot.'"

The statement is indicative of a fundamental change in Job's attitude, from passive acceptance to active rebellion. Pope states that the main emphasis of the curse is not against his birthday, but against a life so embittered that he wishes it had never begun.⁵⁰ Job, according to Terrien, wishes the night of his conception had never come into being and that if *Leviathan* had been stirred up (vs. 8) chaos would have overcome the created order and Job would not have received⁵¹ life. Leviathan is associated with evil that goes with darkness and is opposed to light according to Cyrus Gordon.⁵² The author of Job probably envisaged the struggle between good and evil as a cosmic battle. In Job 41:1, Job is taunted by God with a rhetorical question.

"Can you draw out Leviathan with a hook,
Press down his tongue with a cord?"

This according to Gordon implies that Yahweh rendered Leviathan harmless by putting a hook through his nose or lip, and tied his tongue, leaving him harmless.⁵³

Eliphaz replies to Job and scolds him for not being able to stand up under adversity (4:1-6). Eliphaz affirms the doctrine of

⁵⁰*Ibid.*, p. 28.

⁵¹Terrien, "The Book of Job," p. 926.

⁵²Cyrus Gordon, *Biblical Motifs* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966), p. 3.

⁵³*Ibid.*

individual retribution (4:7-11).

- 7 Consider, what innocent ever perished, or where
have the righteous been destroyed?
- 8 I have observed that they who plow evil and
sow trouble reap the same.
- 9 At a breath of God they perish, a blast of
His anger, and they vanish.
- 10 The lion may roar, the old lion growl,
But the young lion's teeth are broken.
- 11 The lion perishes, robbed of prey,
The lioness' whelps are scattered.

Rather than deal with the particular case of Job, Eliphaz indulges in generalities. Eliphaz appeals to Job's knowledge and experience. He assumes that Job accepts the doctrine of divine retribution. According to Terrien, Eliphaz is shocked by Job's half-blasphemous lament since one only is punished for misdeeds.⁵⁴

In Chapter Five Job qualifies his position by suggesting suffering is disciplinary.

- 17 Fortunate the man whom God corrects.
Let him not spurn Shaddai's discipline.
- 18 He makes a bruise, but he dresses it;
He wounds but his hand also heals.

Suffering is not seen as an end in itself but as a method of improving oneself.

Job replies to Eliphaz that the painful anguish of his situation justifies the extremity of his complaint (VI 1-5).

- 1 Job answered
- 2 "Could my anguish but be weighed,
- 3 'Twere heavier than the sands of the sea;
Therefore are my words vehement.
- 4 For Shaddai's barbs pierce me,

⁵⁴Terrien, "The Book of Job," p. 936.

- My soul sucks in their venom;
 God's terror besets me.
 5 Does the ass bray over his grass?
 The bull bellow over his fodder?"

According to Tur-Sinai verse 2 does not mean that Job asks for his anguish and misery to be weighed against each other (as the wording suggests) for one scale of the balance has the sands of the sea, which is outweighed by anguish and misery.⁵⁵ The passage means: If my anguish could be weighed, it would prove to be heavier than the sands of the sea; and if my misery were laid on the scales it, too, would prove heavier.⁵⁶

Job also replies that Eliphaz' argument is without value and that it is insipid (6:6-7).

- 6 Can flat food be eaten unsalted?
 Is there flavor in slimy cream cheese?
 7 My soul disdains to touch such;
 They are putrid as my flesh.

Job is rejecting Eliphaz' argument as he would reject insipid food. Job challenges his friends to prove his guilt which they are assuming (6:24-30).

- 24 Teach me, and I will be quiet;
 Show me where I have erred.
 25 How pleasant are honest words!
 But what does your arguing prove?
 26 You think to reprove me with words,
 But count as wind my words of despair?
 27 You would cast lots for an orphan,
 Barter over your friend.
 28 Try now to look at me;
 Surely I would not lie to your face.

⁵⁵Tur-Sinai, *op. cit.*, p. 113.

⁵⁶*Ibid.*

- 29 No more, have done with injustice
Relent, for my cause is just.
- 30 Is there iniquity on my tongue?
Can my palate not discriminate words?

Eliphaz has insinuated that Job must have deserved his ills because the wicked are always punished. Job would like to know what he has done to receive such calamity. He challenges his friends to look him in the face and see his honest anguish.

Man's life is short and full of hardships (7:1-10), and why doesn't God leave him alone?

- 1 "Has not man hardship on earth?
Are not his days like those of a hireling?

Job suffers because human life in general is hardship. His life is comparable to a soldier or mercenary whose life is compulsory military service. Physical pain makes nights and days appear to be endless (7:4-5).

Bildad answers characterizing Job's speech as wind that one cannot charge God with injustice (8:1-4) and that his children sinned and got what they deserved.

- 1 Bildad the Shuhite answered:
- 2 "How long will you prate so?
Your speech is so much wind.
- 3 Does God pervert justice?
Does Shaddai distort the right?
- 4 Your children sinned against him,
And he paid them for their sin."

Bildad states that if Job would appeal to God, he might be restored (8:5-7).

- 5 If you will but look to God
And implore the mercy of Shaddai,
- 6 If you are pure and upright,

- He will bestir himself for you
 And restore your righteous estate.
 7 Then your past will be as nothing,
 And your future will prosper greatly.

Bildad is suggesting even if Job is innocent, he may regain his former condition only by asking for God's mercy. Bildad appeals to the lessons of past generations in an attempt to prove that the wicked suffer and the righteous prosper (8:8-22).

Job replies that man cannot be justified before God because of the issue of power. God destroys the innocent and the guilty (9:22).

- 22 'Tis all the same. Therefore I say,
 Guiltless as well as wicked he destroys.

God is characterized as being indifferent to good or evil. Here he denies any moral order in the universe.⁵⁷ Earth is controlled by the wicked and that if God is not responsible for this, then who is (9:24)? The doctrine of God's supreme power creates a problem not an answer.

- 24 Earth is given to the control of the wicked.
 The faces of her judges he covers.
 If not he, then who?

Sick of life, Job complains to and questions God. Can God see through human eyes? Does God share human limitations (10:4)?

- 4 Do you have eyes of flesh?
 Do you see as humans see?

Terrien interprets the passage as Job stating that God acts as a man, in man's inhumanity to man.⁵⁸ Most commentators interpret the

⁵⁷Pope, *op. cit.*, p. 57.

⁵⁸Terrien, "The Book of Job," p. 987.

passage as God does not make a distinction between justice and injustice because his discernment is imperfect like man. Pope states that the question is whether God can really understand and sympathize with man's predicament.⁵⁹

I think Pope is raising the right question. But I would take the conclusion further. God only understands man as he shares in the experiences of man. If God understands human limitations then he experiences limitations. That which you don't experience, you don't know but you may know about. Here we see in Job the evidence of a limited God.

Zophar charges Job with pleading innocence to silence men, but were God to speak Job's guilt would be made clear (11:1-5).

- 1 Zophar the Noomathite answered:
- 2 "Shall this spate of words go unanswered?
Shall the glib one be acquitted?
- 3 Shall your babbling silence men?
Shall you mock and none rebuke?
- 4 You say, 'My doctrine is pure.'
You are clean in your own eyes.
- 5 But would that God might speak,
Might open his lips against you.

The word *babbling* means idle talk or boasting and *glib one* means "man of lips."⁶⁰ Zophar, like Eliphaz and Bildad defends the dogma of divine justice. Zophar affirms the mystery of God (11:7).

Can you fathom the depth of God,
Find the limits of Shaddai.

Job replies in a challenge to God (13:15)

⁵⁹Pope, *op. cit.*, p. 78.

⁶⁰*Ibid.*, p. 81.

- 15 He may slay me, I'll not quaver.
I will defend my conduct to his face.

Job is willing to risk his life in defense of his integrity before God. All Job wants is a fair hearing before God.

We find evidence of Job's struggle with the traditional concept of God in ordeal language (19:7).

- 7 I cry 'violence,' but am not answered;
I shout for help, but there is no redress.

The disbelief in the God of divine retribution is further evidenced by Job's faith in the appearance of the true God (19:25).

- 25 I know my vindicator lives,
A guarantor upon the dust will stand;

A vindicator designates the nearest kinsman who is supposed to exact vengeance in a blood feud (Deut. 14:6-12); II Sam 14:11) or looks after the interests of his kinsman.⁶¹

The term is also applied to Yahweh as deliverer of Israel from bondage in Egypt (Exod 6:6, 15:13) or from exile (Jer. 1:34).⁶² It is applied to Yahweh as deliverer of the individual from imminent death (Psalm 103:4; Lamentations 3:54).⁶³

Job is affirming that the true God will appear as he struggles to throw off the old idea of God.

Job is not always clear the old God is dead, but in language structure there is evidence of doubt of the traditional idea of God (23:3).

⁶¹*Ibid.*, p. 134.

⁶²*Ibid.*

⁶³*Ibid.*

3 O that I knew where to find him,
That I might come to his tribunal.

Job is asking where God is. A conversation with Dr. Fisher indicated that this expression refers to more than a "doubt" concerning God. Fisher feels that it is rather a kind of 'God is dead' expression.

We again find the expression in 35:10.

10 One says not, 'where is God my Maker,
Who gives strength in the night,

Although the speeches of Elihu are considered as an editorial addition, they show a certain understanding of Job. Elihu is chastising Job for doubting God.

In Chapter 31, Job rests his case, challenges God to answer him and write an indictment. Yahweh accepts Job's challenge (39:7).

6 Then Yahweh answered Job
From out of the storm and said:
7 "Gird your loins like a hero;
I will ask you, and you tell me.

The loins were considered the seat of strength and two adversaries would gird their loins with a belt and the one who took the belt off the other was considered in the right.

God displays his wonder in the voice from the whirlwind (38:1-40:5). God displays his wonder in the creation of the world (38:4-15), the mysteries of the land and sky (38:16-38) and the wonders of wild animals.

After experiencing creation Job doesn't want to take God to court but comes to a new understanding of God. Job answers:

2 "I know that you can do all things;
No purpose of yours can be thwarted.
[Who is this who obscures counsel

without knowledge?] I talked of things
 I did not know,
 Wonders beyond my ken.
 [4 Listen, and I will speak;
 I will question you, and you tell me.]
 5 I had heard of you by hearsay,
 But now my own eyes have seen you;
 6 So I recant and repent
 I dust and ashes."

According to Terrien, in *Job: Poet of Existence*, the experiencing of God in creation challenges man to participate in creation.

The major emphases of the Dialogue are as follows.

1. Evil is a cosmic battle.
2. Job rebels against doctrine that his punishment is because of past misdeeds.
3. Suffering is seen as a means of discipline.
4. Man suffers because life is a hardship.
5. God's power is relative.
6. God is a mystery and man can only begin to know the secrets of the Universe.
7. God is manifested in creation.
8. How does one participate in the creative act?
9. God is not tied to tradition.

Having offered this overview of Job, I would like to center on two major points as they are related to an understanding of God and his relation to evil.

These can be formulated in terms of two main questions. "Is God responsible for evil?" "How does one participate with a God of creation in the creative act?" It is at this point that an understanding

of Job is most relevant to contemporary black theology and experience. Job risks theological suicide in order for his faith to be compatible with his experience. Job's pattern contains the clue to the present dilemma in black church school education. The following chapter will be concerned with the development of a new understanding of evil in terms of its relation to God within the perspective of the black church.

CHAPTER V

AN UNDERSTANDING OF GOD AND THE NATURE OF EVIL FOR TODAY'S BLACK CHURCH

The Basic Problem

The purpose of this chapter is to show how the black man's vision of God and his relation to evil can be widened. The Book of Job forces one to reexamine what he has previously believed about God and the nature of good and evil.

A basic question that the black man is asking today, both inside and outside the Christian faith, is "How can our present understanding of God justify evil?" Moreover, this is not a problem which is confined to the black experience alone. As John Hick indicates it is a problem common to Christians in general.

According to John Hick,

Given the traditional belief in God as unique, infinite, uncreated, eternal, personal Spirit, absolute in goodness and power, the accompanying problem of evil, in its general form, is readily stated. . . . If God is perfectly good, He must want to abolish all evil; if He is unlimitedly powerful, He must be able to abolish all evil; but evil exists; therefore either God is not perfectly good or He is not unlimitedly powerful.¹

This chapter deals with the problem of evil and God's relationship to it from the perspective of two fundamental questions. "Is God

¹John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), p. 5.

responsible for evil?" "How does one participate with a God of creation in the creative act?"

There is a rising percentage of black people who no longer share the assumption that the fall of man myth is authentic history. Generally, religious myths come out of the experience of a people to illuminate that experience and not to solve a particular problem. However, many times myths are wrongly treated as a solution to a problem.

A traditional solution finds the origin of evil in the fall. It is seen as the beginning of sin and suffering. But today we know that the conditions which now cause disease and suffering were in the world prior to man and were therefore not a consequence of the first human sin. Secondly, the belief that the whole human race is punished for the sin of Adam and Eve is unjust. Therefore the implied belief that one is punished for historical past misdeeds is incomprehensible. Thirdly, the belief that evil is due only to man's rebellion against God can preserve the Creator from responsibility even though it does not adequately explain how God is not responsible. In this sense, evil is blamed upon a misuse of creative freedom. Yet, the freedom of man is traced to creation which can imply that there must have been a flaw in creation and thus God is not taken "off the hook" in terms of his responsibility for evil.

The Starting Point

There is a better way of understanding evil. A different

understanding of God's power is the key to the problem of evil.²

We can learn from Job. Job challenged the existing doctrine of evil and suffering which had been given to him by his culture and tradition. Job came to a realization that the God he had clung to was not the God of his present experience. Job's mistake was in supposing that he knew the meaning of divine power. Hartshorne describes Job's situation in these words:

He [Job] is simply shown his actual cognitive situation. And what is that situation? That he has been brought up on a theory of all mightiness whose meaning no one understands. . . . There was no clearly understood notion of God's power to give rise to a problem of evil, of why God 'does' this or 'does' that. What does it mean to say, 'God does something'? To accept such a language as clear, but find a puzzle in the divine motive, *why* God does things, is as Berdyaev said, once for all, to treat as a mystery a problem which one has 'already overrationalized.' The puzzle begins one step earlier. Human 'power' we know something about, but what sort of analogy enables us to speak of 'divine power'? Until we have this analogy straight, there is no clearly defined problem of evil.³

Job had overestimated the claims of "omnipotence" in that God was understood to have a monopoly over power. Hartshorne makes the problem clear.

God's power or influence must of course be worshipful, unsurpassably great; but to identify this unsurpassability of power with its sheer monopoly, a control which all concrete details of existence are determined, leaving the creatures with nothing to determine for themselves, no genuine options of their own, is to burden the divine worshipfulness with a logical paradox of our own making.⁴

²John Cobb, *God and the World* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1969), p. 87.

³Charles Hartshorne, *A Natural Theology for Our Time* (La Salle: Open Court, 1967), p. 118.

⁴*Ibid.*, p. 119.

Job partially understands that there can be no moral "why" for sufferings and that life is not free of the risk of unmerited suffering. As Hartshorne indicates, even in the myth Job's sufferings were not directly from God but from Satan as the personification of evil. Moreover, these were transmitted via the Sabaens, the Chaldeans, lightening, wind, and also his own bodily cells.⁵ Thus, suffering came not from God but through fellow creatures and natural elements.

From the above interpretive context, we can see that in supreme creativity, there are lesser forms of creativity but the supreme form sets limits to the chance elements introduced by the lesser forms yet either cannot eliminate the other.⁶ In other words, God's omnipotence may be understood in terms of the setting of certain limits and evil is to be explained from within the structure of existence. God establishes an order in which creatures can send us particular goods and evils.

John Cobb states that "the only power capable of any worthwhile result is the power of persuasion."⁷ This means that God does not have a monopoly on power but that he "exercises the optimum persuasive power in relation to whatever is."⁸ God's power understood in this way does not take all the responsibility for evil in the world from God. Again if we go back to Hartshorne we can see that God sets limits to the chance element in creation to provide a measure of order.

⁵*Ibid.*, p. 122.

⁷Cobb, *op. cit.*, p. 90.

⁶*Ibid.*, p. 121.

⁸*Ibid.*

Cobb describes this further.

If God is understood as that factor in the universe which makes for novelty, life, intensity of feeling, consciousness, freedom, and in man a genuine concern for others, and which provides a measure of order which supports these, we must recognize that he is responsible in a significant way for evil in the world.⁹

The understanding of Job that God is responsible for evil in the world without denying man's responsibility is a keen insight. We can draw the conclusion that God's power can be understood as relative and this adds a new meaning to omnipotence. One also can say that he is not punished for past misdeeds nor is suffering seen as a means of discipline. One can consider how God acts upon the world as the One who draws us to an ideal which is in tension with other urges and desires. How then can we describe human evil?

Evil can be seen as that which thwarts self-actualization. Evil is then involved when a man seizes immediate satisfaction at the expense of his own future or that of others.¹⁰ For example, it may be immediately satisfying for a nation to cut the welfare rolls to save money for the state. But this is done at the expense of people who are in need as well as the future of the state in helping to create a better life. Self-actualization is to achieve some immediate value and to provide for future values--your own and those of others.¹¹ For example, it is necessary for the black man to survive in order to constantly move toward a liberation from oppression and this provides for greater value.

⁹*Ibid.*, p. 96.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, p. 95.

¹¹*Ibid.*

Whitehead has a profound statement on evil which he describes in light of the purposive element of God's aim for every occasion that anticipates the future and the meaningfulness of the immediate act as determinative of the future. It is seen in terms of the religious spirit which goes beyond the immediate experience to an all inclusive purpose with a deep concern for future values for self and others.

Religion is the vision of something which stands beyond, behind, and within the passing flux of immediate things; something which is real, and yet waiting to be realized; something which is a remote possibility, and yet the greatest of present facts; something that gives meaning to all that passes, and yet eludes apprehension; something whose possession is the final good, and yet is beyond all reach; something which is the ultimate ideal, and the hopeless quest.¹²

It may be that this vision of the purpose of God is that which aims at self-actualization. In Whitehead's understanding evil is the thwarting of this vision.

"Evil is the brute motive force of fragmentary purpose, disregarding the eternal vision. Evil is overruling, retarding, hurting."¹³

We see that the ultimate value is the eternal vision and that the world fails to achieve it. The world is constantly provided with the opportunity to bring about the realization of that aim but it is caught up in seeking immediate satisfactions at the expense of the future. Thus, we see that evil in this sense is the destruction of God's aim. God's aim includes evil in that it involves loss, selection,

¹²Alfred N. Whitehead, *Science in the Modern World* (New York: Macmillan, 1925), pp. 191-92.

¹³*Ibid.*, p. 192.

and inhibition. But yet, God's aim is for each occasion's ultimate value. This understanding has direct relevance for the black experience.

Creative Response

The black man must participate in creation so as to actualize himself for immediate as well as future satisfactions. To do this is to heed God's call toward the liberating advance and not accept a view of God that places approval on suffering. Cone makes this understanding clear.

. . . Black Theology cannot accept any view of God that even *indirectly* places divine approval on human suffering. The death and resurrection of Christ does not mean that God promises us a future reality in order that we might bear the present evil. The suffering that Christ accepted and which is promised to his disciples is not to be equated with the easy acceptance of human injustice inflicted by white oppressors. God cannot be the God of black people and also will their suffering. To be elected by God does not mean freely accepting the evils of the oppressors but the suffering which is inseparable from the gospel is that style of existence that arises from a decision to *be* in spite of nonbeing. It is that type of suffering that is inseparable from freedom, that freedom that affirms black liberation despite the white powers of evil. It is suffering in the struggle for liberation.¹⁴

The only suffering that the black man can affirm, according to Cone, is that which is brought about seeking liberation. In other words, the suffering which results from the attempts to realize the eternal vision.

¹⁴James Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation* (New York: Lipincott, 1970), p. 149.

"Creative" as defined by Paul Tillich is that "of living spontaneously, in action and reaction, with the contents of one's cultural life."¹⁵ The black experience is part of a unique cultural life in which one must live creatively and in participation in the liberating advance within the "eternal vision" of God. A participant in creation must affirm himself as receiving as well as transforming reality creatively.¹⁶ He loves and affirms himself because reality is actualized through him. It is the courage *to be* as oneself and the courage *to be* as a part.¹⁷ *To be* is synonymous with creativity. If one is *to be*, one must be creative and able to actualize new things. Whitehead relates this in terms of "novelty."

Creativity is the principle of *novelty*. An actual occasion is a novel entity diverse from any entity in the 'many' which it unifies. Thus 'creativity' introduces novelty into the content of the many, which are the universe disjunctively. The 'creative advance' is the application of this ultimate principle of creativity to each novel situation which it originates.¹⁸

Creatures move forward toward greater values through this novelty which unites the other entities but is different from any entity it unifies. This move forward is what Whitehead calls the "creative advance." In the black struggle for liberation when the

¹⁵Paul Tillich, *The Courage To Be* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1952), p. 46.

¹⁶*Ibid.*

¹⁷*Ibid.*, p. 105.

¹⁸Alfred N. Whitehead, *Process and Reality* (Toronto: Collier-Macmillan, 1969), p. 25.

black man moves toward greater self-actualization he participates in the creative advance which brings about greater values. It is this which I call the "liberating advance."

In this chapter I have attempted to show that God does not punish for past misdeeds and that suffering is not a means of discipline by God. I established a conceptual framework to show that a concept of God in terms of relative power is most compatible with the contemporary black experience. It can be seen that God is not responsible for evil as it is a part of each actual occasion of experience, but that he is significantly related to it. Evil is that which thwarts self-actualization. The black man must participate in creation to overcome this evil which destroys the eternal vision of God. There must be a sense of self-actualization in the immediate experience as well as an anticipation of the future for oneself and others. In the next chapter I will establish some of the specific consequences of this study in terms of black Christian education.

CHAPTER VI

IMPLICATIONS OF STUDY FOR CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

IN THE BLACK CHURCH

The Perspective of the Chapter

The aim of Christian education should be the empowerment of the individual so that he may actualize himself in creating immediate values as well as anticipating the future. What is taught must be utilized in the life of the individual. Whitehead states: "Teachers must not teach students ideas that are merely received into the mind without being utilized, or tested or thrown in fresh combinations."¹

The context of Christian education must be the black experience interacting with the Christian tradition enabling the individual to internalize the "eternal vision" as mentioned in the previous chapter. Whitehead describes the process.

Utilizing an idea means relating it to that stream, compounded of sense perceptions, feelings, hopes, desires, and of mental activities adjusting thought to thought which forms our life.²

Job is an example of a Biblical character who tested and discarded some traditional ideas and we can learn from him. Job dealt with existential questions and risked theological death in spurning traditional answers in order to confront life in the raw. As we look

¹Alfred N. Whitehead, *The Aims of Education* (London: Williams & Norgate, 1958), p. 13.

²*Ibid.*, p. 15.

at education, it must not place truth under an exclusive weight of the past, or to isolate oneself from the past, but see there is continuity as well as discontinuity with the past. Job did not place exclusive value on his present experience. His strong faith in God came out of his past experience and he refused to disbelieve that the true God would appear. For Job, the true God appeared in creation. William Clayton Bower, a Whiteheadian Christian educator, writes of education as creative process in his book, *Character Through Creative Experience* which gives support to a view of education drawn from Job.

A far sounder approach to the problem of education is to think of human life as a continuing *process*, moving from a past into an open, undetermined, and as yet uncreated future. To place undue or exclusive value upon the past is to weight the process with heredity and tradition, so that it becomes conservative, backwardlooking, assimilative, and authoritative. To place exclusive value upon the present experience of the learner in isolation from the past out of which the present has issued is to disregard the continuity of experience, to set the learner adrift in an open and uncharted world, to disregard the experience of the past in the light of which alone the present experience can derive its deepest meaning, and to discount the priceless values that have grown up out of centuries of experimenting with life.

Rather, education should find its setting in the whole process of human experience as it moves creatively out of the long and meaningful past with its accumulated insights, achievements, and values into a future that holds untold possibilities that are as yet unrealized. When education is set in this larger framework of the whole human process, its operating center becomes the present moment of personal and social experience in which the past is united with the future in a continuous process and in which alone the forces of reconstruction can work creatively for the redirecting of that process.³

³William Clayton Bower, *Character Through Creative Experience* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1930), pp. 14-15.

In Job, we have a reconstruction of values and attitudes which enabled him to move creatively into the future. His outlook on the world was changed in the death of the God of tradition. New purposes and directions opened in life for him. Job experienced the mystery and awe of God in creation which revised the question of how does one participate with God in creation? Job's view of life was dynamic and not tied to tradition. From an educational perspective Bower clarifies this view.

This view does not think of education, or even of life itself, in terms of statistics, but in terms of dynamics. It assumes that our physical world is itself in process of continuous creation, so human experience and civilization are in a process of continuous creation.⁴

Education viewed from this perspective is not thought of as the assimilation of knowledge or for the maintaining of the *status quo*. Education is seen in the light of the meeting of the past and the unrealized future. Ideas and values are tested and expanded or discarded as necessary. This view of education brings in the reconstruction of society as part of the learning process.

The technique for this educational process must get its pattern from the processes by which persons develop a "vision of reality" and from the processes by which society are reconstructed. We can find insights into the process on the basis of what is known concerning the nature of consciousness and of society. There are a large number of experiments in this area which have had a large measure of success.

⁴*Ibid.*, p. 17.

What is the significance of these considerations for the development of a consciousness in individuals that will lead to participation with God in the world? Consciousness or "vision of reality" is concerned with persons as such. It seeks to develop one's "vision of reality" in terms of faith and attitudes toward the world, God and man. It seeks to critically look at values and to actualize new values in the world. The concern is with personal and social values. Bower aptly describes this process which he labels the ethical spirit in *Character Through Creative Experience*.

Dealing as it does with the criticism and reorganization of values, its attitude is essentially creative. At best the ethical spirit has always been a free and severe critic of the *status quo* of social life. It has shown the disposition to hold life as it is up in light of what it ought to be and to pass judgment upon it. The criteria upon which it bases its criticisms are just these personal and social values. The question which ethics asks of any institution or process, be it economic, social, political, educational, or ecclesiastical, is, what contribution does this institution or process make to the self-realization of persons or groups involved in it? The good life at its best dwells with lingering yearning upon the possibilities of growth in the light of the highest social and spiritual ideas that center in a universe of moral values.⁵

What are the theological presuppositions inherent in this form of Christian Education? What is the learning theory? How can this be structured as a model for the local church? How can the insights gained from this study be translated into a specific classroom experience?

A theology of Christian education is determined by what it

⁵*Ibid.*, p. 19.

assumes about God. This study affirms that God acts in creation and evil is that which thwarts God's aim--self-actualization. Man interacts with God in the creative process and God is personal. Bower supports this personal understanding of God in *Christ and Christian Education*.

Moreover, the reality with which man interacts is, from the religious point of view, personal. Science has disclosed a universe that operates according to uniformities and 'laws' that are amenable only to thought. For centuries the recognition of this fact has led the religious mind to believe that running through the structures and processes of the universe and working in it is a Supreme Intelligence. History seems to abound in evidence that the order and structure of reality is moral. That is to say, it is an order of values. But, so far as our experience goes, intelligence and values are functions only of persons. The religious mind is convinced, therefore, that there is something personal at the heart of reality. . . . To the religious mind, this aspect of reality, however it may be conceived, is the Supreme Person, God.⁶

Learning Theory

Bower suggests that learning does not take place unless it leads to action. He lists seven steps from the perspective of functional Christian education which help persons and groups resolve their situation in light of the Christian faith. Bower writes:

- (1) The person must become aware of the situation they face in their daily life.⁷ The person may be exposed consciously to activities which impinge upon his daily life--political responsibility, church, school and family.

⁶William Clayton Bower, *Christ and Christian Education* (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1942), p. 56.

⁷*Ibid.*, p. 58.

- (2) The issue or issues involved in a given situation must be clarified.⁸ Complex issues may require critical reflection whereas simple situations may not.
- (3) The factors of the situation must be analyzed and alternatives for possible action considered.⁹ One must not overlook possible factors involved nor limit the range of choice.
- (4) All available sources of knowledge must be brought to bear on the issue.¹⁰ All existing knowledge represents a reservoir of past experience to be utilized as a resource in resolving an issue.¹¹
- (5) Make a decision as to what best seem more clearly to conform to Christian judgment.¹² It is the point where one moves from thinking to action.¹³
- (6) The next step is the actual trying out of the decision.¹⁴ It is the action step. It is where the validity of one's choice is seen as sound or not sound.
- (7) The final step is consummatory.¹⁵ It is called the reflection step later in this study--specifically in a model of change in the church. This step consists 'of the integration of each particular choice, commitment, and action into the whole system of attitudes, sentiments, and habits, of the whole self.'¹⁶ It is at this step that one achieves an orientation of his self toward Christ and a way of life.¹⁷

Educational Model

A model for structuring a learning situation which will lead toward an active participation in alleviating that which blocks black self-actualization, based on the seven steps of Bower, must now be considered. It is based on a process of action-reflection. It begins with exposure to a specific situation which leads to action-reflection.

⁸*Ibid.*, p. 59.

⁹*Ibid.*

¹⁰*Ibid.*, p. 60.

¹¹*Ibid.*

¹²*Ibid.*, p. 61.

¹³*Ibid.*

¹⁴*Ibid.*

¹⁵*Ibid.*

¹⁶*Ibid.*

¹⁷*Ibid.*

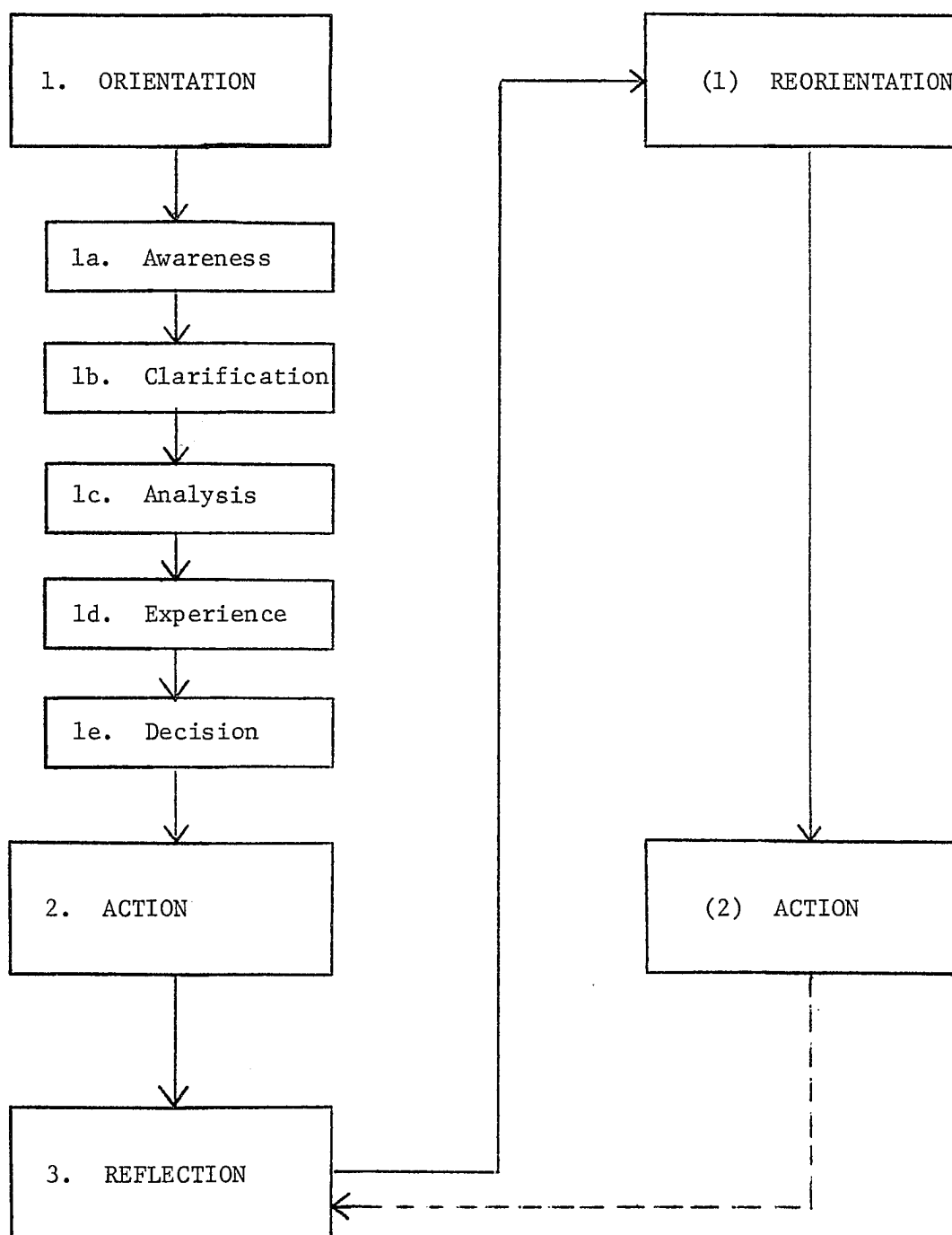
Specific curriculum designs may be worked out based upon this particular model. The objectives of the approach to the congregations are: (1) to stimulate awareness and interest in problems of the black condition, (2) to heighten inner conflict within persons and groups so that it may lead to some action, and (3) to enable the person or groups to see the issues in historical perspective and to project means for reconstructing oneself and society. Resources would be sections of this dissertation as a means of seeing how one's concept of God influences his actions in the world, how God is viewed in present day black Christian education, and how a new understanding of God for black folk will lead to a more active participation in the world in changing the black condition. Also secular agencies would be helpful with the preparation of various resources to stimulate awareness and sensitivity to the problems of the black condition. Following is a diagramatic presentation of Bower's process utilized to change the black condition.

Teaching-Learning Unit

The teaching-learning unit is divided into four weekly two-hour sessions. The group is composed of people from different cultural and educational backgrounds. The unit is adaptable to various situations. The teacher of the unit is the minister. The unit's learning theory is based on Bower's seven steps to learning. The intent is to lead one to a greater participation in solving the problems of the black condition through a self-conscious life style. The unit will

A PROCESS MODEL FOR CHRISTIAN EDUCATION IN CHANGING
THE BLACK CONDITION THROUGH THE CHURCHES

(FLOW CHART)



A PROCESS MODEL FOR CHRISTIAN EDUCATION IN CHANGING
THE BLACK CONDITION THROUGH THE CHURCHES
(OUTLINE)

1. ORIENTATION

- 1a. Awareness. Exposure to the black condition and that which thwarts self-actualization, to the point where the person says, "The problem exists."
- 1b. Clarification. Prerequisite of clear thinking, decision, and commitment. Additional information and input to the point where the person says, "I must do something about the problem."
- 1c. Analysis. Consideration of factors and alternatives for possible action.
- 1d. Experience. Bring to bear on the situation all available sources of knowledge.
- 1e. Decision. Point where thinking moves to action. Make choice that conforms to Christian values.

2. ACTION

Direct engagement/involvement/participation in the world as related to the black condition in some responsible and meaningful way.

3. REFLECTION

Integration of each particular choice, commitment and action into habit-patterns and attitudes that lead to a way of life. Conscious interpretation:

- 1) Systematic analysis of the experience and results of direct action.
- 2) Decisive thought on:
 - the problems of the black condition
 - personal and social responsibility for changing the black condition
 - religious commitment to mature and guide action in changing the black condition

(1) REORIENTATION

Achievement of a new approach:

new ideas . . .

new views . . .

new commitments . . .

. . . in changing the black condition

(2) ACTION

Direct engagement/involvement/participation in changing the black condition at a new level of need and potential effectiveness.

deal with how one's "vision" of reality relates to one's life style. The following are some of the questions which will be asked. In what way are you conscious of the reality you are a part? How are you conscious of yourself, God and the world? How do you relate to the world in bringing about good and evil within the black condition? What was Job's view of reality? How did he understand God and the world? What was Job's life style? What is God and the world saying to our life style and how do we deal with it? The focus of the questions are in the direction of affirming a God of creation that will lead toward an active participation with God in the world to solve the problems which confront blacks.

This outline is to serve as a guide. The content and procedure is continuously worked out in interaction among the learners. Initially the teacher sets the stage. The topic is introduced through a brief introduction.

Session 1

Objective: To understand the concept "vision" of reality. To relate the African vision of reality of the 18th century to today's black American Christian "vision" of reality.

I. The following outline is set forth.

- A. How are you conscious of the world, God and man?
- B. What are your beliefs about the reality you are a part of?
- C. What did the African believe about God and the world?

The session will begin with a presentation based upon the following outline.

1. African view of God and the world.
2. Idea of God in present church school literature.

II. After the presentation and introduction the class will be led into several groups. Each group is given some material with which to work in discussion in light of the following questions which are part of the session outline.

- A. What does your article say about man's view of the world and God?
- B. What does it say about God's action?
- C. What does it say about your personal lives?
- D. Is there any way you see yourself in these particular articles or quotes?

Group I - - Newspaper clipping of slum area.

Group II - - Newspaper clipping of presidential address.

Group III - - Sermon on the Mount.

Group IV - - Picture from African newspaper.

Group V - - Quote from Martin Luther King's 'I Have A Dream' speech.

After a fifteen minute discussion and reflection in small groups the large group reconvenes and considers their material and conclusions by sharing with the total group.

III. After all groups report back a summary of all material and conclusions are made. The group is asked to reflect during the week on what one believes.

Session II

Objective: To come to an understanding of what one believes.

To answer the question what one must change in his beliefs.

I. To get hold of the objectives the following outline is set forth.

A. Break up into diads.

1. Discussion of individual beliefs about God, evil and the world.
2. How do you experience God, evil, and the world?
3. Define evil.

II. To give a brief introduction and presentation concerning beliefs about God and evil in church school curriculum and the Book of Job.

- A. God is all powerful and punishes in church school literature.
- B. Job risked theological suicide to experience life in the raw and rebelled against the God of tradition. He affirmed the God of creation and that man must participate in the creative process.
- C. How must man in theory respond to creation.
 1. He must self-actualize himself.

III. Into diads

- A. Discussion of what one must change about individual beliefs about God, evil and the world.
 1. Should I affirm the God of creation?
 2. If so, How do I affirm such a God?

After a thirty minute discussion and reflection in diads the large group reconvenes and shares their conclusions with the total group.

IV. After all groups report back a summary of all material and conclusions are made. The group is asked to reflect upon how they are going to change their beliefs.

Session III

Objective: To come to an understanding of how one can change his beliefs about God, man and the world.

- I. To examine the following questions.
 - A. What are my objectives for change?
 - B. What are my strategies for change?
 - C. What are my tactics for change?
- II. Divide into groups to discuss the questions. Appoint to each group a leader who will report back the main ideas of the discussion.
- III. Come into one large group report and summarize.
 - A. Close the group by drawing together ideas of the groups.
 - B. During week reflect upon one's own personal life style.

Session IV

Objective: To answer and act on what new personal styles of life are necessary if one is going to live out what one believes.

- I. To act out one's own life style in a simulation experience.
 - A. Simulation game on how one responds in different situations.
 1. Student on riot torn campus.
 2. Marriage difficulties.
 3. Community in deterioration.

II. Divide into groups and discuss experiences.

A. Individual encounter concerning different life styles.

III. Come to one group and discuss what specific actions one is going to take in living out his life.

IV. Into closing ritual of consciously living out one's own life.

The above outline is a suggested one as indicated previously. It will change according to emerging insights of the group.

Learning Context as Community

Christian education at its best takes place in a community of co-operating persons. The purpose of the learning community should be dealing with the issues that confront one in his daily life in light of the Christian faith. Bower describes this community in terms of secular education.

Such a school will be a community of co-operating persons organized for the purpose of locating the issues and needs of living, of finding out what their meaning is, of discovering the values that are resident in them, and of undertaking their solution in the light of the best experience and standards of the race and the demands of the present.¹⁸

Learning will be seen as an opportunity.¹⁹ Learning should not be imposed upon people as a program of set tasks. This is authoritative and inhibits the releasing of creative energy for worthwhile

¹⁸Bower, *Character Through Creative Experience*, p. 176.

¹⁹*Ibid.*

achievement. The function of the community is to assist the learner in using the resources of the Christian tradition in an open field of limitless and stimulating opportunity. It is a laboratory of learning in which the basic pattern is guided creative activity.²⁰

The community should be a group of persons working together to achieve shared purposes.²¹ Its fundamental pattern is based upon relationships between person and person, between person and group, between group and person.²² Value is placed upon variety in that there are different viewpoints which can be expressed within the community.

It is a cooperative community of learning in which the learner will be a responsible participant "in the determination of the content, the procedure, and the results of the process."²³ The content should be live problems the learners are struggling with, not just the teacher's problems. Participation on the part of the learner will help determine content. This also extends to the learning procedures.

The teacher is a responsible member of the group. He will not seek to be an authority figure or thought of in terms of his status in the group. Bower describes the function of the teacher as one who shares his resources.

His greatest contribution to the community of learning will come through sharing with the eager spirit. . . . his own ideals and purposes, his insights, his enthusiasms, his experience, his techniques, and his achievements.²⁴

²⁰*Ibid.*, p. 180.

²¹*Ibid.*

²²*Ibid.*

²³*Ibid.*, p. 182.

²⁴*Ibid.*, p. 183.

One must experience God in the learning community. God is found in the living experience of the issues that confront man in the present world. God is experienced in self-actualization whereby a person is reconstructing tradition, just as Job, in light of new insights and values. Bower suggests that we find this God in the living experience of man.

But if we would find the living God, we must look for him where Jesus found him--in the living experience of living men confronted with the realities of the present world, where men hope and fear, where they strive and suffer, where the creative forces of life are as much at work as in any historic period, and where history is in the making.²⁵

Summary and Conclusion

The exposure of the slaves to Christianity altered their vision of reality. The slaves passed from a structure of civilized existence in which the dominant mentality was mythical to that of axial existence in which rational reflection gained precedence.

The vision of the world as divine creation was part of the African heritage and was altered by Christianity in a new horizon. Instead of an impersonal power pervading the universe in African religion, the universe was seen pervaded by a personal power. The slaves spoke of walking and talking with God and a God who experienced their trials and tribulations.

We see the black experience as that of a process in which higher values are actualized. The crossing into axial existence

²⁵Bower, *Christ and Christian Education*, p. 36.

opened up a whole new range of potentials. This enabled the black man to symbolically order his experience at a higher degree of the reflective conscious.

The approach one has toward the world is influenced by one's view of God. There were five basic ways of approaching God indicated in this study. Men may be led to speak of God by reflection on the *whole*; through reflection on the *order* they observe; through their sense of *absolute dependence*; through being confronted by the absolute "ought" in their moral experience; and through a more particular *religious experience*. All five ways are expressed in black church curriculum with the *moral experience* as an approach to God being predominant.

God is seen as omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent. God is seen as one who protects those who are good and punishes those who do not conform to his way. He is capricious and possesses all the characteristics of human beings.

The effects upon the black man of these approaches to God has been predominantly an emphasis on man's helplessness, sinfulness, and worthlessness.

The views of God mentioned have given hope to black people but have lessened his maturation. It has given them the hope that God was going to make a way somehow out of their oppression. It was an affirmation that what was suffered was temporal. Many blacks have not been able to see that they should take more of a responsibility for their destiny. Black Protestantism is currently becoming the

religion of an oppressed urban proletariat which exists in an environment that provides minimal opportunities for development. In the next twenty or thirty years it was brought out that we will see a weakening of black Protestant churches which is in part probably due to its understanding of God and evil.

The Book of Job points us in a direction of gaining insights into the black condition. We have the black man's search for identity which is creating self-acceptance. The poet of Job strips the masks of moralism and ecclesiasticism which oppresses in order to be himself. The black man is asking existential questions which come out of the black condition in order to grasp reality as lived. The poet of Job dealt with existential questions and risked theological death in spurning traditional answers in order to confront life in the raw. We see that Job questioned the traditional understanding of omnipotent power and blamed God for much of the evil in the world. Job came to an understanding of a God of creation which raises the question how does one participate in creation?

It was suggested that the black should participate in the creative act so as to self-actualize himself to bring about immediate values as well as anticipate values for the future. Whiteheadian-Cobb concept of God has been utilized in the study in proposing a re-education of the black man.

Evil was seen as the thwarting of self-actualization which inhibits the eternal vision which is that of God. The key to an understanding of evil lies in our understanding of God's power. God's

power understood as persuasive is more helpful in seeing that evil in the world is due to a large degree from the incapacity of man to be moved by inclusive goals. God was seen as that actuality which calls us forward to higher values or liberation.

In the creative process God is present and active. It follows that the black man must be educated to participate in the creative act in creating values as well as anticipating the future.

The implication for Christian education is that the black church must move in the direction of helping to develop a God-consciousness among black people that will lead toward self-actualization. The effects of such a consciousness would enable the black man to participate in the creative process that will lead to a self-directing, maturing, and a more forceful effort in throwing off oppression.

The black church would therefore be more relevant in meeting the needs of black folk. The recommendation as an outgrowth of this study is that the black church create an educational model that leads to the development of a consciousness in the individual that will lead to self-actualization for immediate satisfaction as well as anticipating values for the future. It must lead to liberation as internalized in the "eternal vision" of Whitehead. The effects of such a model will be a more vigorous black church in terms of bringing about freedom.

The vision of reality as creation will lead to a more creative participation in the creative act.

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